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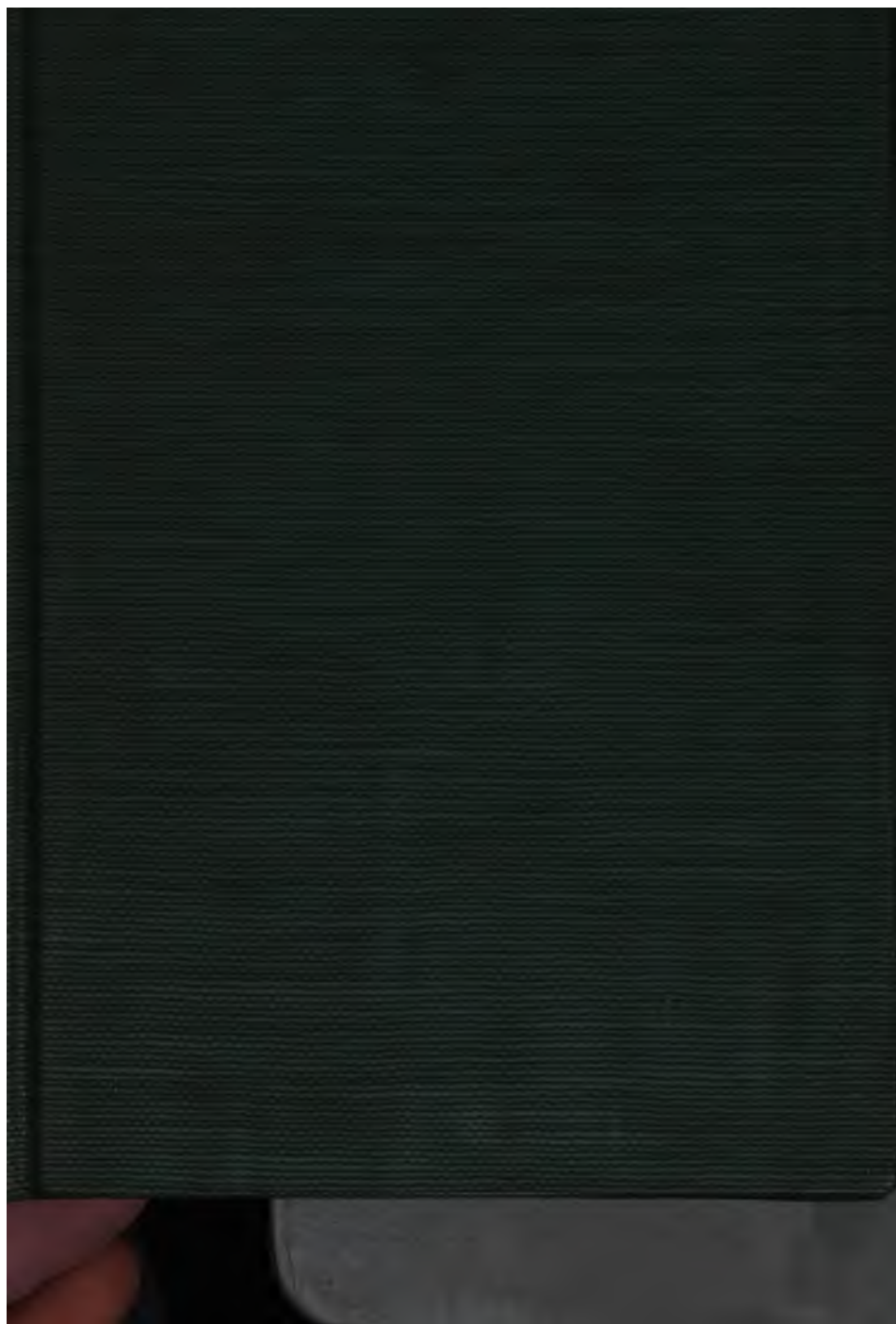
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THE HERD

BY

J. OLIVE PATRICIA WARD

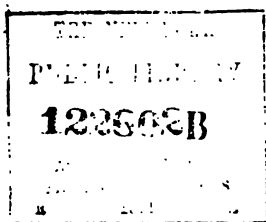


NEW YORK

COCHRANE PUBLISHING CO.

1908

1112



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DEDICATION.

To the Herd, with whom I allied myself in sympathy when on the Western plains, I dedicate this work; hoping by a portrayal of conditions as I found them, to direct the attention of the country to facts of which many no doubt are in ignorance.

THE AUTHOR.

FOREWORD.

THIS is a book of fiction, yet the incidents contained are in the main based on facts. The author has attributed to her principal characters actions and motives found or observed in various persons. The actions and motives have usually had actual existence; also, in most cases, the injustices perpetrated have had real counterparts; but the persons concerned have not always been the same.

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CHAPTER I.

A DAUGHTER'S DEFIANCE.

KATHLEEN FREEMAN was, for the first two weeks, known to the pupils of the old red brick High as the "new girl"; the third week half of the girls and all of the boys spoke of her as Miss Freeman; by the end of a month she was just plain Kathleen to all of us.

We knew little of her former life, enough, however, to whet our juvenile curiosity to a keen edge. She, with her parents, had come from the East—New York, Washington, Boston, or some equally remote spot—and all were residing indefinitely at The Groves. This was a spacious old house, of colonial pattern, perched on the summit of a hill, the acropolis of the city. The broad veranda, which ran around the house on three sides, in early spring and late autumn was loaded with rose blossoms and frail clematis. To the south stood hardy shrubs, large beds of stately chrysanthemums and bristling dahlias, while at the foot of towering cedars, helpless violets were nestled, half concealed by soft moss. To the east or rear lay spreading tennis grounds; and beyond these could be seen the fruit orchard, which—now it was October—was laden with a matured harvest.

Such was the exterior of The Groves, but the mysteries and beauties of the interior were not to be revealed to

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our prying eyes. However, Fred Mason said that he saw a real oil painting on the wall, one night when the lights were lighted, and another time, when the door was opened, he saw a silk curtain or hanging of some kind. We knew nothing more.

It was Tuesday of the first week in October, that Kathleen joined us at the old red High. She was sixteen, tall for her age, yet looked extremely youthful, her eyes blue—a rare blue—were trusting and confiding; her lips, a trifle too thin perhaps, carried an expression of sweetness and sincerity. She was in the senior class, and installed herself immediately a general favorite. She possessed a charm of manner, a magnetism that invited friendship, but repelled familiarity; she owned strength of character, having purpose immensely developed for one of her years, a condition which could hardly find reconciliation with her sweetness of nature.

The more we saw of her the better we liked her; Bob Southland apparently was of the same mind. He was a youthful lawyer and political aspirant, twelve years her senior—a well rounded, fully developed, finished man of the world; one who had revelled in a dual life, the evil predominating; one who during adolescence had oversown his crop of wild oats, and now retreated into inertia.

Previous to Kathleen's coming, Southland had looked upon all womankind as he had found them, in his own words, "easy"; but her beauty fascinated him, her sincerity metamorphosed, her innocence conquered; he loved her.

During the late fall and through the long winter they were frequently together; in walking, driving, skating or ice-boating they were companions; he, always persistently



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sedulous, did not woo with youth's impetuosity, but chose the plan of mature manhood—calm, unremitting, fervent. With pleasure she accepted his attentions, regarding him as one might an elder brother or father.

"Bob would make a good man if he would only marry and settle down," remarked the feminine portion of Redwood's inhabitants.

"A mighty nice sort of fellow is Southland," answered the male members to their wives. "If Lou Freeman's daughter had him, she could manufacture a pretty decent man out of him, after throwing away the debris. She surely has a powerful influence over him."

She did have an influence over him; none realized it more than Kathleen's father and mother. They thought it over, talked it over, and came to a decision: Kathleen must marry Southland.

One evening—it was early spring—Bob saw Kathleen, who had gone for a walk. His mind was made up; she would, must marry him. Abruptly, yet tenderly, he spoke, "Kathleen, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

Betraying no surprise, her eyes were raised; they were earnest, sincere. She gazed into his face steadily; she studied it. The chin was strong, the mouth good, even kind, the broad forehead unusually intelligent. Then her glance fell, and she flushed delicately. She was immensely flattered that this big powerful creature, once so surfeited with living should be her slave; she was proud of her captive.

He perceived that she faltered. Will you, Kathleen?" he pleaded in a low voice. "God knows I love you, Kathleen."

"I am so young, Bob."

Unheeding her words, he went on impetuously, "Your

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parents wish it too, Kathleen. I shall make you happy; I must, I will have you."

His tone was ardent, his manner fervent, but the intensity of feeling depicted in his eyes—yellow eyes—perplexed, frightened her. For a husband, was he all she desired? Powerful in mind and body, was he complete? His character was deficient; he was at heart pusillanimous. The yellow gleam faded from his eyes; now they were dark and tender. She looked at him again; perhaps she had judged erroneously; he appeared the embodiment of honor and courage.

"I will give you time, Kathleen. Years will be short in waiting for you. Give me some hope. Wear this"—he placed in her hand a bow of blue ribbon, a true lover's knot—"to signify that you care a little, that you will strive to care more," and he looked at her strangely. "Though you do not love me, though you hate me, I will never lose you; I will marry you." His tone was serious—dangerous, Kathleen construed.

A few nights afterwards a rumor was current that Southland, having emerged from his lethargy, was going at a lively pace. Numerous escapades were accredited to him; several names were coupled with his, but he was the ringleader. The report reached Kathleen; through ignorance its import was not clear to her, yet she shunned him as a malefactor.

Bob, observing her attitude, did not draw reins on his misdeeds; instead he sought out as allies Kathleen's parents. Mrs. Freeman, gentle of nature, abhorring all disagreeable subjects, placed the matter of Kathleen's subjection wholly in the hands of Kathleen's father. Left to himself, Mr. Freeman took up the work cautiously, as he

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thought, being fully aware of his daughter's resolute will in affairs of moment, he must act prudently.

Nothing shallow, liberal-minded to a fault, Mr. Freeman did not foresee the danger of placing Kathleen's life and happiness in Bob's keeping. Bob had wealth and loved her; that to him was sufficient. "Youth must have play; it's nature. Southland is no worse than other young men," he told his daughter, endeavoring to convince her of exaggerating Bob's failings. "When you grow older you will better understand."

Kathleen looked at her father; it was a look peculiarly her own, a look she seldom gave, a look once seen never to be forgotten, a look given in a crisis. Lou Freeman's daughter felt that the time had come when she must concede to her father's wishes and marry Bob Southland or openly revolt. She loved her parent; never in the almost eighteen years of her life had she refused to do his bidding.

"Father," (her face flushed with innocent embarrassment) "I can not comprehend the full enormity of Bob's deeds. But he is unworthy of me; he has disgraced himself and others; he is a coward."

"Show me the young man of to-day who isn't going at the same lively gait!" said her father, with a touch of impatience, for what he deemed his daughter's stubbornness.

Kathleen, biting her lips, strove to conceal her emotion. "It is an insult to humanity, to young men to say that, father; it is unpardonable effrontery to ask me to marry him. I never will."

Mr. Freeman had prepared himself for opposition, but he had never anticipated defeat. Though Kathleen's voice was gentle, there was open defiance in her look—a

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look that in after years her opponents learned to fear, and her allies to reverence; it was impregnable.

Abruptly Mr. Freeman left his daughter and sought out his wife. They discussed, and thought, and talked, and at length they arrived at a conclusion; Kathleen must leave The Groves; she must go on a visit to some place—really no place—in the Dakotas, where a brother of Mrs. Freeman lived. There they would send their daughter and “there she will remain until she is cured of her foolish stubbornness,” said the father, his small gray eyes glaring with green light under his heavy brows.

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CHAPTER II.

IN EXILE.

At four o'clock in the afternoon train 607, with its burden of a score or more of laden freight cars, pulled wearily into the little station of Lone, stopped, gave a sudden lurch forward, and stopped again with seeming sullenness, apparently defying all power to move it. The passengers slowly emerged through the narrow door of the accommodation coach, unanxious to leave behind that foul-odored enclosure. Among the dozen persons who alighted, nearly as many types of humanity were represented.

Leading this heterogeneous file was a gray-haired man, fifty perhaps, portly, pompous, one who, having made his way in life, felt the world by debt owed him the right of precedence; accepting this honor as our ancestors accepted the divine right to their kingdoms. Following closely came a cowboy, he of the sombrero and herder trappings, red-haired, red-eyed, a passable harmony; his bronze-skinned face bore a "shoot to kill" expression, his meager claim to superiority having been obtained by force of arms. A Russian woman, once beautiful, tall, gaunt, slave-like, hollow-eyed, pale, ignorant, shuffled out of the car, holding with one hand a black ragged shawl over her black hair, and leading a hungry-countenanced boy of five with the other. A lithe Indian half-blood stealthily succeeded the woman. His hands were decorated with brass rings, the front of his jacket covered with fantastic beads and gewgaws. It was pitiful.

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Kathleen alighted last, was met by her Uncle Jim Delane coldly and in businesslike fashion. He was a man of head not heart Kathleen decided with her first glance into the hard steel blue eyes.

Jim Delane was forty-five; thirty years previous (twenty, he said) he left his home in the middle East, and came West to Wisconsin, thence to Iowa, South Dakota, southern North Dakota, and at last pushed himself, also his interests, into northern North Dakota.

At first, his youth handicapped him on all sides—a puppet, a very atomical puppet, he struggled in the powerful sea of commercialism, rising, submerged, rising again. At thirty he came to the surface for the last time, and made a real beginning. At thirty-five he was a figure in the world of trade, at forty he was a power, a weighty power in many portions of the western States. Though his worth in money was written in one million and some, yet he still labored to aggrandize those numbers.

“Every penny justly earned,” boasted Delane. It was—if extortions, petty trickeries, concealed frauds are just. “I never injured man or beast,” he vaunted.

They walked in silence, Kathleen made no effort to speak. She studied the cruel face beside her with the skill of a physiognomist, the avarice for money power, for position was stamped on each feature; the former man, the normal man, had dwindled, and finance held a slave.

“Here!” The lone monosyllable was uttered with effort, after an eighty rods silent walk, as Delane opened the door of a trim cottage. The roof was slanting, giving the appearance of a shed; the house, painted white, trimmed with a ghastly blue—anything but artistic—was withal inviting.

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Mrs. Blair, Delane's housekeeper, and her daughter, Mayme Richards, met Kathleen warmly, with wholesome hospitality, so characteristic of the West and the western masses. Mrs. Blair had been married twice, the first—she always distinguished her husbands by number—died naturally; the second "got away;" properly speaking he left and never was seen again. His wife mourned one year, secretly hoping for his return; then, from force of habit, perhaps, she awaited the third. Five years had slipped by and the third was not visible, yet she still remained sanguine.

Her daughter Mayme was nineteen, with golden hair, a sickly golden; pale blue eyes, tall and thin as the traditional bean pole. She loved driving, worshipped dogs, adored horses. "Mayme he'd orter ben a boy, there ain't no use talkin', I sometimes think I made a mistake," Mrs. Blair never failed to remark to strangers.

"Oh, mother!" came the never altered reply from the daughter. Her voice, pitched somewhere between a shrieking nasal and moaning guttural, was unpleasant, grating.

Left alone—Mrs. Blair and Mayme had gone "to git supper"—the dreariness of exile stole over Kathleen. She looked through the narrow window; green pasture lands, fields of waving wheat just ripening, hills and hills were everywhere. Herds of cattle grazed in the almost invisible distance, a stupid owl perched on a gate post stared with foolish eyes at the red summer sun, the echo of horse's hoofs sounded on the uneven road.

"Lone!" Kathleen smiled faintly. Was ever name more applicable?

Secretly longing for home, she gazed at the crudely constructed houses scattered about her; she thought of

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home, of father, of mother, of Bob Southland. She would never marry Bob. Must she therefore remain in this spot always? It was intolerable. She must take up some work, find some interest in living, until her father would relent and welcome her back unconditionally.

After supper that evening Kathleen suggested a walk, and Mayme went with her. The street—there was only one—was a narrow crooked path running diagonally from the corner of the bank on one side to the front of the post-office on the opposite. It was down this street they passed, Kathleen drawing unconsciously the attention of everyone.

"There's where Dr. Harlow lived afore he moved away." Mayme pointed a finger at a large angular house with a narrow porch. "He it was that saved Mrs. Murray's baby from dyin' when it was just a-dyin' of the croup last winter. It was wonderful how he ever a-saved her. No other doctor would a-done it. Ma says so. And there's where Mr. Gilman's housekeeper lives. Mr. Gilman's father tried to run for Senator once years ago, but he got beat; he didn't have no pull, I guess. Ma says so. And here" (they had reached the terminus of the path or street) "is the hotel Mr. Miller put up at the night he spoke afore election. Oh, say, he was a smart man! Just grand! You orter a-seen him! Well, this here is the hotel he stopped at that night. Right there on the south do you see that window? That window is in the room he slept in. And, say, do you know what I done the morning after he left? I run upstairs right into that there room afore the bed was made up or anything. I just had a sorter hankerin' in me. I wanted to see it just as he had left it, you know. Did you ever feel that way? It's a funny feelin', but of course

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you don't know what it's like if you never wanted to see a room a great man had slept in. Just think! They say he took a bath that morning afore he went to git the train at six o'clock! Everybody talked about it! How a man like him—so busy you know—would get up one half hour earlier in the morning just to do a thing like that. I don't like to take a bath very well, do you? But then I take one every time I am going to a dance or any doings of that kind. It's better, don't you think so? Ma says so."

Kathleen smiled, with difficulty checking a hearty laugh. The thoughts of home grew dim, exile grew brighter. She was interested in Mayme, the friendly, simple-hearted creature with the distasteful drawling voice; she was absorbed by her novel surroundings, fascinated with the West, its manners and its peoples.

"This is the hotel where we hold all our balls; the Coyote Club is going to give one Friday night. You must go. It will be just grand! The Carlson boys always give the music, one plays the fiddle and the other one used to play a mouth-organ, but last time he played on the accordion. It will be just grand! You will go, won't you, Kathleen? I'll see that you git a pardner. There's lots of nice fellows you could go with. There's Billy Schultz, he works on your uncle's ranch. Oh, say, he's fine! and then there's Jimmie Murphy, he used to run a blind pig over there on the corner by the lumber shed. I'll show you the place when we come back; but they caught him this spring and now he ain't doin' nothing. But he's nice looking, just grand! Then there's a Mr. Stewart, he just come to town; he works in your uncle's bank, but I don't think he'd go. He's so quiet

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like. He went once, but he didn't seem to have a good time. He didn't enter into the fun somehow."

Kathleen secretly wondered what was the full meaning of entering in. "Perhaps you would like him, though, he's more city like. But say, you'll go, won't you, Kathleen? It will be just grand! There's the Russian settlement over the tracks; it looks funny, don't it? Russian town they call it."

Russian town, lying on the south side of the "Soo" tracks, was unique and interesting. The houses were small huts, low, oblong, built of mud bleached almost white in the sun. The two windows—one in the rear, one in front—were narrow, and set well into the clay walls. One door opened at the side, and the roof was covered with black, rain-stained, wheat straw.

The men labored in the fields, the women with them, at haying, harvesting—anything that was at hand. Drudgery was incessant. Children of ten and twelve were in appearance dwarfed adults. Work was their only acquaintance, recreation a stranger.

"Are they ever hungry or cold in winter?" Kathleen inquired.

"Yes, sometimes; last year was a good year because crops was heavy, but this year I don't know; some think times will be awful hard. One never knows."

"Are they cold if the winter is long and severe?"

"Well, no, not often. Do you see that brown pile over there? Well, that's mischt; that's what the Russians call it, but it's nothing but manure. They use that for fuel, the children or women mix it with dirt, pour water on it, then stamp on it with their bare feet, cut it in squares and leave it to dry; when it is dry it is ready to use. It is awful to do that! Often when there ain't

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no money, and times is hard, everyone except the rich here has to use it. They can't buy anything else. You know it smells so dreadful too! But one can't be too particular; we often have to burn it. Your uncle won't give us fuel when he hain't 'round; he says 'it's cheaper and just as good.' Of course we poor folks can't say nothing; we hev to take what we kin git. You see, it wouldn't do to kick; your uncle would send us off and get somebody else in our place, and all we have to depend on is our living here; that's 'bout all we git out of it."

"Is no one interested in these people? Don't any one try to help them?" There was a pathetic tremor in Kathleen's voice.

"Well, I hearn your uncle, Mr. Delane, say that new man of his'n (he calls Mr. Stewart, in the bank, his new man), is a powerful man in business, but is too much in sympathy with the common herd—he requires a trimming down. But it's the opinion of most folks that that Stewart isn't one who is easily trum down. He's awful set in his ways."

"I would like to meet Mr. Stewart." Kathleen was pensive.

"He went to the city last Saturday; he was to be back to-night. I don't know if he come or not. He don't board to our house; he stays over at Mrs. Mattin's across the street. Mrs. Mattin's a lovely woman, you orter see her; and she's got the cutest baby ever." But Mayne's rhapsodies were not listened to, for Kathleen was forming a scheme to arouse these people to the realization of their condition. Her commiseration was stirred; from the depths of her sensitive soul she pitied them. She would enter into this philanthropical work with her whole mind and whole body.

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The blood-red summer sun was just falling behind an irregular hill that stood out aggressively against the cloudless sky as Kathleen and Mayme returned.

"There's Mr. Stewart now, a-standin' on Mrs. Mattin's porch, and there's Mr. and Mrs. Mattin and the baby. Ain't she cunnin'?"

Kathleen paused, resting one hand on the gate latch, seemingly observing the sunset, but her eyes fell on the object of their conversation, the subject of her thoughts—Marshall Stewart. He was standing in the flood of the departing sunset's brilliancy. Each line in his youthful face was defined vividly. It was a strong face, and firm. He was a man who would court justice determinedly, track right persistently, cling to a purpose doggedly; failure was unknown to him.

"He is not handsome," Kathleen said in an undertone, speaking more to herself than to her companion; "but he is fascinating, irresistible."

As the sun dropped below the horizon his powerful form and profile were silhouetted more definitely against the darkened sky. How masterful he looked! His figure—tall, large, ungraceful, yet commanding, was resplendent in the afterglow of the sunken sun, as a statue of Apollo brightened by altar fires. How like a hero he was! How like a god!

"I wish I knew more about him. Who is he, I wonder?" Kathleen was concerned—a rare thing for her. She was interested in Stewart more than she was aware, more even than she confessed to herself. She was almost ashamed of her admiration. As she opened the gate, it clicked audibly. He apparently did not hear it; he was thinking.

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CHAPTER III.

ANCESTORS.

IF there was one subject in the world upon which Delane might be approached with safety it was the subject of his new man. By nature sullenly reticent, when Stewart's name was mentioned he would open up surprisingly. He admired the man's powerful intellectual capacity, his individualism, self-reliance, his total disregard for money, position—everything, if conscience must be sacrificed, principle victimized.

"Stewart is a wonderful man, truly wonderful; too bad he is on the off side. He is becoming mighty popular with the commoners here. He is getting too influential."

It was known, known universally, that while Delane held Stewart in the highest possible esteem, he feared him. He was a leader; he was bound to have followers.

"Who is Stewart?" Kathleen ventured the interrogative cautiously,—feeling that her uncle would mistake her interest, and perhaps uncoil vehemently. It was his way when approached upon undesirable topics at unfavorable times.

"Stewart is"—Delane spoke with deliberation—"the all round best fellow I have ever had the good fortune to meet. He's sure to make a success sooner or later, a howling success. He is certain to draw a winning card, whatever work he takes a grip on is sure to move forward move lively, too. He will steer his canoe in life a few lengths ahead of other boaters. He is bound to be vic-

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tor." Delane had grown enthusiastic in spite of himself.

"Do you know anything of his family and of his life before he came here?" Kathleen dared to question Delane further.

"Don't probe into ancestry. He is enough of himself, if he never had any ancestors." Delane glared savagely at Kathleen. "Yes, I know a great deal about him." Delane's voice and glance had softened—yet he spoke bluntly; it was his way. "His breed is good, both father and mother came of good stock. His mother is French, his father Irish of English descent, though of Scotch name; that conglomeration makes Stewart the man he is, fearless, masterful, self-confident. His father, Westley Stewart, was a doctor who lived in an obscure town in southern Illinois, where he had been born and raised. He had three sons, two were well on in their teens and the other, the youngest, Marshall, was just three, when there came a letter from England, bearing a legal mark. Westley Stewart was rich, it announced, immensely rich, heir to many hundred thousand pounds; a distant relative had died, and Westley reaped the harvest.

"A few years found the Stewarts located in the East, the two boys had been through college. Money flowed freely; the older sons lived idle useless lives, they dissipated. Vice hustled vice until the whole gamut of wickedness was completed; then they returned home, penniless wrecks. 'I've made two fools, I'll see to it I don't make the third,' said the elder Stewart. That day he called Marshall to him; the boy was eleven. 'See here, youngster, you are the only one in this family who isn't a fool yet, and you will never become one if it lies in my power to prevent it. You may have shelter here under

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my roof, but you will have to get your own education. Remember, lad, you will have to shift for yourself. There are two failures on my hands already. Let me see one success. You will try, won't you, Marshall?' That was over twelve years ago, nearly thirteen. You see for yourself what Marshall has done. But remember, Kathleen" (Delane was mellowed indeed when he addressed his niece as Kathleen), "remember this is only the beginning."

After Kathleen had been in Lone one week, and had known Stewart but four days, they were friends, notwithstanding the short acquaintance. Soon he was giving her a synopsis of his life.

"Were you never tempted to desert, to give up the struggle?" Kathleen inquired.

"Yes, once," Marshall replied slowly. "It was the twentieth of November. I remember the day well—one of those beautiful days in late autumn when the air is cool and crisp, and something in the atmosphere sends the blood tingling through your body, rushing through your veins and you feel like leaping and shouting, but you can't explain your jubilation. I was eighteen and working my way through the first year at college. The mail brought me a letter that morning. It was from my father; he, mother and my brothers were to pass the winter South, and they would start on the morrow. I confess frankly, after hammering my own way alone for seven hard years, I felt like throwing it all up. I was downright discouraged. I left college for a week, played hooky I guess. At the beginning of the second week, however, I returned and kept at it and graduated a year or more ago." Marshall always spoke openly of himself, his life, his plans.

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"And now you are a success." Kathleen intended to pay him the gentlest compliment.

"No." He did not look at her; his eyes were searching the distance, his thoughts following his look.

Repulsed somewhat by his inattention, Kathleen glanced at him timidly. Her first opinion of him, that he was not good-looking was singularly revised. His dark face was handsome, the eyes thoughtful, kind, the mouth firm, yet sweet and tender, the angles in his large body were subdued, and he appeared really graceful. His voice was mellow and penetrating. Kathleen was idealizing Marshall.

"But you *are* a success," she persisted.

"No," he smiled at her, "I am still a failure. Success in life means so many different things. There is that which the world deems success—fame, fortune, any realized ambition. Then there is another success, the only true one, that which lies within ourselves, the sort that feeds the heart with a satisfied conscience, a knowledge of having done all one can to aid others. Ambition rests in being helpful, performing deeds of humanity. To cultivate and teach a broadened altruistic spirit is my ambition. I desire to evolve, to raise man up in the scale of existence—up, up until the millenium is gained. Then I will cease to be a failure; I will be a success.

Marshall drew in a deep breath; it was almost a sigh, the waves of air were resonant as they vibrated through his massive chest. Kathleen watched him with admiring silence. He was like a ponderous machine capable of everything, she thought.

"That is why I came here," Marshall went on, talking frankly of his plans. "I intend to study social conditions here and elsewhere; perhaps I may be able to wrench

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these sufferers from the clutches of the money worshippers. I will try, I may hope to triumph, and then—but" (here he smiled, and his face was fascinating as the relaxed features illumined his whole countenance) "you may not care to hear of this; these people are not of your world; I understand you were reared in luxury. They must seem almost barbaric to you."

"You misjudge me. I am concerned, and share your solicitude. I yearn to render them aid. May I not?" Kathleen hesitated; she feared Marshall might not concede to her wishes. "I would so like to co-operate with you. May we not take up this work together?"

"It will be difficult for you, a woman. One has to live with the people, and live as they do, to comprehend their position. You will find the task too assiduous; you are too tender, too sensitive to witness and endure all you must hear if——"

"I can undergo everything if I will be of assistance."

Marshall smiled kindly into her eyes, as they were raised to his face with earnest appeal. "I believe you will make me an ardent helpmate. You are truly sincere."

"And we will win," Kathleen said triumphantly.

"Yes, but there is one chance of our losing, if we——"

"If we—? How can we lose?"

Marshall was thinking all their plans would fail if they should not continue the work jointly. He could not now have the courage to wrestle along alone, but he felt it best not to say what was in his mind, so he went on. "A stranger coming to this section of the country, looks upon these people as ignorant, as a non-ambitious class, but this is an error, decidedly. We have here intelligent men, educated, some of them, but they cannot develop; they are poor, they cannot rise. The man with money

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holds them down and keeps a firm clutch on the thumb-screws. I might cite cases that would appear almost incredible, they are so inhuman."

"May I hear one?" Kathleen spoke with feeling.

"Yes, one, but you will soon know for yourself how affairs stand. It happened late in June. I had been in Lone but one week. A man, young like myself, was drowned in Fish River, which is only a small stream, little more than a creek. In previous years it frequently went dry during the summer months, but the heavy spring rains, which fell so copiously during late April and early May had widened its channel, and the water flowed in abundance. The drowning was an accident; the news was conveyed to the owner of the stock ranch, where the river's bed lay. 'Drowned,' he ejaculated. 'Impossible,' 'Yes, drowned in Fish River.' 'Good! there will be plenty of water for the cattle this year.'"

Kathleen's lips quivered. "I understand; he was my uncle."

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CHAPTER IV.

BOBBIE.

WAS it a coincidence? The same day that Marshall Stewart left Lone for a month to go to Winnipeg, in behalf of the extensive Delane interests there—that same day, at night, Kathleen for the first time fastened the bow of ribbon—Southland's bow—onto the bosom of her dress. She looked at it guiltily, abashed, then quickly unfastened it, and hid it under her waist. It lay now directly over her heart; the blue color seemed bold as it rested close to her white bosom, which rose and fell with suddenness, the ends of ribbon fluttering lightly with each pulsation of her throbbing heart.

Why did she do it? Kathleen could not have answered the question had she been asked. She was a stranger to herself. She hated Bob, hated him more as time passed, and—she must confess the fact to herself—she was interested in Marshall.

Her fingers trembled as they closed over the soft satin folds of ribbon, but she did not remove it; still it nestled against her breast as she fell asleep.

* * * * *

"Yes, Miss, he's a broncho." Kathleen feared bronchos as all Easterners do. "But he's perfectly trusty," said Broze, the foreman, to Kathleen, as he led out Bobbie, the saddle-horse, for her. She was to take her first canter that morning. "Don't be timid, Miss. Bobbie's the most sure-footed hoss we've got on the whole blamed ranch, Miss. Gentle as a kitten, too. Why, Miss, it

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would hurt Bobbie as much as it would you if anything should happen when you was a-ridin' him. He is a tender-hearted critter, he is; blamed if he isn't."

Bobbie was a typical broncho in appearance; civilization had accomplished much for him, however. His entire system of animal instincts was changed; he was, as Broze said, "gentle as a kitten."

"Come on, Miss; don't be skeerd." The foreman stroked the horse's neck with a rough yet affectionate touch, and Bobbie, turning his head, looked his appreciation.

"I'll tell you a story of Bobbie, Miss, if you keer to listen. No, Bobbie's not young any more; he's a little stiff in the joints at times, and his gait ain't so fast as it was once. Why, there was a time, some years back, that he could outrace any hoss on the whole western prairies, he could. He was a blamed good runner them days, he was. But he's gettin' old now; he's thirty this comin' Thanksgiving Day. Gettin' on in years mighty fast, isn't he? But jimminy! Miss, Holy Gee! but he was a pretty hoss when he was a colt. Your uncle got him the first year he come West, and he's kept him ever sence. I sometimes feel things would go to the dogs if we hadn't Bobbie around. He was quick as an arrow them days, but he's never ben the same exactly sence the time of the fire. Do you want to hear of it, Miss?"

Broze did not give Kathleen opportunity to reply, but continued his narrative. Resting one hand on Bobbie's neck he pushed back his large gray sombrero from his bronzed face with the other.

Bobbie was just six, with slim legs that could run as lightning, and never get tired. I never saw that hoss tired afore; you could ride him all day on a dead run, and

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he'd be as fresh in the evenin' as though he'd jest come out of the stable, he would. But the fire, Miss, yer hern tell of fires, forest fires and prairie fires, havn't yer? Never seed one, did yer? Mighty lucky yer didn't; still it's almost worth while ef yer gits out with yer scalp. It's mighty excitin', it is, to hev the fire runnin' yer down, and yer jest keepin' out of the way, to feel its hot flame 'gainst yer cheek and have the burnin' tufts of dry grass whizzin' by yer face like bullets, and hev it leapin' and leapin' behind yer, tryin' ter ketch up, and then the roarin' and roarin.' Damned if it ain't excitin', excitin' as when ye're in a stampede." Broze struck the ground with his whip, and buried the heel of his boot and spur in the earth with impulsiveness.

"Bobbie's had a career he has. Your uncle, Delane, and me are the same age exactly, Miss, only I am two years younger than him. We worked together twenty-four years ago for a man named Braddock; there's where it was I first knew your Uncle Jim, and well, I swan, ef we hain't ben together off and on ever sence. But yer see, Miss, Delane's of the upper crust while I am still underneath. But I don't mind, I'm happier, I think. Money changes folks so they are never the same, somehow; when things gits ter movin' their way they forgets all erbout old friends and good old times, and they gits heartless, they gits cruel, they does. Waal, Miss, as I said, yer uncle and me worked for Braddock twenty-four years ago. It was there that Bobbie made his race against death; there's whar he outrun the fire. It was in August; it had been hot and dry all summer. We hadn't had no rain to speak of sence the last of May; everything was singed with heat. We had been dreading a fire for most a month back, but still it hadn't come yet, it hadn't. But

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it come the thirty-first of August, I remember the night well. I had jest got back ter the shack, after lookin' up the steers that grazed south of the river. I was to get supper, and Delane was to be back afore sundown after seein' the north division of cattle was in shape. The sun war pretty well down; it war nearly nine o'clock and after, but Delane war nowhere in sight. I had expected him back full two hours earlier; but I didn't worry. I knew the north section of cattle was a mean dirty bunch, ter git together, and Delane would never leave them, I knew, till they war all located, he wouldn't. So I war a settin' in front of the cabin waitin'. I warn't thinkin' of nothin' in partickler; a feller don't think much when he's young. I war only a kid then, jest erbout eighteen. I looks up of a sudden for some reason, I don't recollect now why, but I could see smoke in the distance, 'way over ter the north. Was it smoke, I asks myself, or was it jest the shadows? But on second look I knew it war smoke all right, and comin' toward us like mad. It must hev ben ten mile away. It war 'way over near Cactus Point. I remember it seemed ter be belched right out of the top of that thar hill. It war comin' closer, thar war no mistakin' it war a fire. I knew what that meant. My first thought war of Delane. I wondered if he war safe, but I felt he warn't, 'cause he war goin' right over near the Point to look his cattle up. My next impulse war to jump onter a hoss and go look fer him to warn him. But then I knew I would be a darned fool if I did, and it would probably be all up with both of us. I could do nothing but put for the river five miles away, and thar war no time ter be lost either. The fire hed come a good mile while I war deliberatin'. I ran ter the barn, and took the first hoss I comes to. I didn't wait

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to fasten on a saddle, but jumped on bareback. I reached the river in time; I must hev ben thar five mile ahead of the fire. I war safe myself, but I jest couldn't git my mind off yer uncle. I feared fer him, but still I knowed ef thar war a hoss in the world that would make the river ahead of the fire it war Bobbie. I don't know how long I waited; it seemed hours, but it couldn't hev ben mor'n twenty minutes perhaps. I had gotten off my hoss, and war standin' near the bank of the river, ready ter jump in at a moment's notice. I war lookin' in all directions to see ef I could git a sight of Delane. No use; the smoke war rollin' toward me so fast and thick it got into my eyes and blinded me; the tufts of burnin' grass war hurled against my face, and the fire war lickin' its way along the parched soil toward me, and shootin' up toward the sky in blood-red streaks of flame. The whole place seemed ablaze; the earth, the sky and even the river behind me glowed with the vivid light. The fire war not a mile away; then, fer the first time, I felt what a coward I war, a damned mean ugly coward thar, standin' in reach of safety. and Delane—well, I war sure he war gone."

"No doubt that very flame of fire that war creepin' toward me ahead of them others had left him dead and charred way back there on the plains, miles away, perhaps. Jest then—Oh, God! what did I see comin' toward me? A hundred rods, eighty rods away, a horse, a rider! Volumes of smoke were about them, above them, under them, all sides of them, the fire was chasing so close after. On, on, they come, the fire war only twenty rods away, now ten, now five. The hoss war keepin' close ter the earth, his neck war stretched forward, his ears lay flat on his head. Three rods away; the fire war within ten yards of him. He stumbled, then up again; his mouth

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war foamin', his side pantin' and throbbin' with exertion, his nostrils distended and drippin' red with blood. On! and only five yards away the fire caught his fetlocks, blistered his feet. One more gallant effort, and he plunged into the water. The fire blazin', roarin', hung over us for a moment as we lay securely in the cool, safe water; then the flames leaped the river and was gone.

"We came up wet and drippin'. Bobbie struggled to the bank, his head fell between his legs, his knees trembled and his firm young flesh quivered as he fell to the ground. He came out all right, but we worked on him a good time. That's the story of Bobbie and the fire, Miss. Do yer wonder he's stiff in the joints at times, and not so sprightly as once? Do yer wonder I sometimes thinks the ranch couldn't run without Bobbie?" Broze placed his arm over the neck of the horse, and laid his cheek against Bobbie's head. It was a grateful tribute of affection. "Come on, Miss. Yer ain't skeerd of Bobbie now, is yer?"

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CHAPTER V.

GULCH JACK.

DISTANT VIEW, as the Delane Ranch was known, lay thirty miles from Lone. It was an extensive area, reaching from Cactus Point on the north, to Bradley Hill on the south. The eastern and western boundaries were seemingly terminated by the rise and set of the sun. It contained twenty thousand acres within its limits, and these figures were obtained by none too rigid mathematical calculations.

The contour of the land was on the whole irregular. Here a solitary rock-jutted hill, based on a flat surface, rose abruptly; here was an unbroken range of low grass-sheltered mounds; there a jagged gulch forced a way through miniature twin mountains, whose broad flat summits vied in altitude with the low morning clouds.

The country for miles around was utilized principally for grazing purposes, though on level portions often were seen wheat and flax fields. Outside Distant View, or the Delane domain, the land still maintained its wonted irregularity and was, if possible, even more aggressively obstinate in its formation.

This land had been homesteaded a few years previous by free-thinking, industrious, liberty-loving immigrants, mostly Russians. Their capital, if any, was meagre, usually a team of horses, some two to six head of cattle, and a dozen pair of hands—for every man had ten or a dozen children. All labored; even the smallest toddler contributed to the maintenance of the family. Pitted

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against him was the wealth, experience, prestige of *the* moneyed octopus. Delane was the supreme antagonist in that vicinity; Gillen a man of considerable fortune, *was* a staunch ally.

The present year had opened hopefully; the wheat grains were full and plump, the pastures luxuriant with a satisfying growth. The people were comparatively happy; they counted on putting by a little, be it ever so small an amount. But the cold nights were followed by damp, foggy mornings, and later in each day a hot summer sun completed the ruin; the wheat was rusted, and disease got among the cattle; fire took away many of their rude shacks; they were in despair, many practically homeless and all without money. There was but one way out of the dilemma; they must sell their land and leave the country. Delane, Gillen, and others of a powerful syndicate, became suddenly and surprisingly intimate with the "foreign scrubs."

* * * * *

"It never rains but it pours! To think Mr. Stewart should happen home from Canada to-day, too," said Mrs. Blair, surveying herself with satisfaction in the one mirror—sadly cracked—that the house possessed. She arranged with unnecessary precision the broad ties of her stiffly starched apron, straightened the wide folds of pink ribbon at her neck, fastened more securely the red bow in her iron-gray hair, and brushed away part of the overabundance of talcum from her right cheek. "There, I guess I'll do now. What do you think, Mayme?"

"Oh, you look just fine, ma, just grand. I bet you are sure to make a hit with old Gulch Jack to-night. Wouldn't it be mighty jolly, ma, if he was to be my third pa?"

"Now, Mayme, you just keep still. This is no time for

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such nonsense. There comes Mr. Gilbert, (Gulch Jack) now. Keep still, I tell you," almost shrieked Mrs. Blair, as Gulch Jack, followed by Delane, opened the kitchen door, but Mayme never paused in her idle chatter about her third pa.

"Let me tell you right here, just one thing, Delane," and Gulch Jack threw his six feet two inches and two hundred and sixty pounds into the sturdiest chair the room contained. He had carefully selected it with a view to its stability, but it quaked under the ponderous burden, menacing momentary collapse. "Let me tell you right here, just one thing, Delane," and Gulch Jack struck the arm of the chair with forceful violence while the legs of that helpless piece of furniture reeled unsteadily under the powerful blow. "You are a rich man, worth millions, millions! Delane, you are a lucky cur, by gosh!"

"Are you positive?" Delane's voice trembled, his eyes lighted with unnatural brightness, and he moved about uncertainly. "Tell me, tell me man, do you speak the truth or am I mad—mad? Millions, millions! It has been my eternal dream, the labor of my whole life; I have existed on the thought." He grew silent, then, turning suddenly upon Gulch Jack, shrieked, "My God, man, tell me, is it true?" He clutched Gulch Jack's arm in a paroxysm of frenzy (or was it insanity?). "Tell me, for God's sake."

"Hell! Delane; you act like a lunatic. What in the devil do you suppose I spent forty years in the mines in California and Colorado, all over the country for, if I don't know quartz when I see it? I repeat it, that your land, every foot of it, in my opinion, is full of quartz—iron, coal, in unlimited quantities. And by the Lord, I swear you are worth millions. Fool millions, I say. Do you understand?"

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Delane sank down upon a broad, flat-topped couch that stood in one corner of the eating room; he was opposite Gulch Jack, and was staring before him with vacant eyes. "I understand," he gasped, but his mind was dull, his words thick; he was stupefied.

"Wake up there! Put an end to such cursed foolishness. Can't you see, Delane, there is work to be done? You can triple your wealth before to-morrow night. Git up there, you old fool." Gulch Jack gave his listener a vigorous slap on his shoulder. Delane's face reflected the doubt that was in his mind, but he did not say anything; he was skeptical. It all appeared so improbable, so impossible. "I've a plan to unfold to you if you'll give me the price, only \$2,000. But, damn it! I can't deal with a carcass."

And Gulch Jack, with giant strides, went toward the kitchen door. Delane aroused from his apathy and started after him.

"What is it, Jack? The money is yours." Delane had in a suitable manner recovered.

"Thank the Lord you come out of it all right," said Gulch Jack, ending with a coarse hilarious laugh. "You'll pull through now, I guess. But sit down, sit down man, I see you're still weak, and your legs are a little shaky. I suppose it was a great shock. For \$2,000, remember." Gulch Jack winked at Delane.

"Yes, and more too for your knowledge."

"You don't own Bleak Ridge, do you?"

"No."

"Nor Stony Heights?"

"No."

"Nor Breezy Air?"

"No."

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"You can get them, can't you?"

"Yes, but they ask three dollars per acre."

"For God's sake! What in hell do you want to give?"

"I offered them one."

"And they wouldn't take it?" Gulch Jack's voice was keen with sarcasm. "It surprises me."

"Is it worth it?"

"Lord, yes; and a thousand times more. Those hills are fairly busting with ore. I went all over there yesterday; that land is worth its weight in gold."

"I'll offer them two, and I think they'll take it. They are damned hard up, crops ruined, cattle gone, families starving. I'll make money out of it."

"Do the fair thing by them, man, make it ten. You'll get loads of coin out of it, even then. Conscience will rest a little easier this winter."

"To hell with conscience! I lost that years ago."

"Have pity on the poor, hungry brutes!"

"The devil I will. It's each man for himself in this world."

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CHAPTER VI.

ANTAGONISTS.

STEWART had not been in Lone more than a month, before he was picked out by others, as a man who could do things. All eyes were upon him. During a recent trip to Bismarck, Wilson, the millionaire land owner, spotted him mentally, as a splendid assistant in squelching the Reformers, a mushroom political faction springing up all over the two Dakotas. Harrington of Carrington, studying Marshall on the main line of the "Soo," for a run of fifty miles, decided he was the one man capable of subduing the restless element of homesteaders up North in the State, where a determination to secure justice at the hands of greedy ranchmen was holding a large section in persistent agitation. Delane, too, had scheduled many plans, always including Stewart as the one to effect their completion, the foremost being the purchase of all lands bordering on Distant View. It was on a Saturday afternoon that he approached Marshall on the matter, with a temerity that age some times experiences in the presence of youth or wealth before poverty.

"How are times going with you this fall, Stewart? Is money tight?"

"Rather," honestly confessed Marshall. "Though I think I have enough to tide myself over the winter."

Delane was scrutinizing Marshall keenly, with half-closed piercing eyes. They were in Delane's bank, and Stewart was at work.

"Now, I think I can do something for you," said De-

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lane, leaning toward Stewart with anxiousness. "What would you say if I should help you to several hundred dollars, even more perhaps?"

"Would it come fairly?" questioned Marshall, without raising his eyes from his books. He placed absolutely no faith in the plans of his employer, who was always scheming some injustice.

"You will work for it. Better make up your mind beforehand to take it. You'll need money for yourself before spring comes. Perhaps you have not heard old Williams has been burned out. You loaned him \$300 of your wages, I think, didn't you? Young Anderson is dead, too. You can scarcely expect his wife, left with eight small children, to give up the sum her husband owed. You would be taking the bread out of her babies' mouths, the life out of their very veins if you received it. But she isn't able to pay up, anyway. Then there's the money you threw away on the Foster boys, to send them to college, mere sentiment's sake, that's the way any sane man would look at it. Now, they haven't a copper coin to their names. There may be more, I don't remember them all. Don't you think a thousand or two would look mighty big and inviting before spring?"

"I candidly admit it would, seeing times are so hard and so many in distress. I might be of assistance to some of them. Perhaps I could build shelter for Williams for the winter, sustain the Anderson orphans and widow and put life into their veins again. Money would look mammoth and temptingly enticing then." Stewart had been watching Delane closely during this speech; the latter winced visibly under the taunting words, for these people were in want mainly because of his parsimony.

"I have a project that must be carried out before the

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day is over, and you are the only man who can accomplish it. I have the money; are you willing to do the work?"

"If it is an honest deal, no trickery——"

"It is honest." Delane flinched momentarily. Stewart's gaze was fixed upon him steadily. "Honest? Yes, in the eyes of the commercial world, to us, the kings of finance." He always referred boastingly to the moneyed kings, including himself invariably among their number. "But to the underbrush from the forest, the cockle among the wheat, with your overfed morals, exaggerated consciences, it would mean nothing short of hell and eternal damnation, I suppose."

Stewart stood as a statue. The warm passionate nature of his French and Irish ancestors threatened instantaneous revolt at the cruel words; but the calm nature of his Saxon parentage curbed his passion, and tempered the rapid flow of blood in his veins. He was himself again—serene, controllable. He made no reply.

Delane eagerly grasped the bait—Marshall's silence; he deemed it a cue to Stewart's submission. "Briefly, my land is filled with ore, therefore valuable. The land which is not mine is also filled with ore, likewise valuable. The people who possess these outside lands are ignorant of their worth. I must buy them up quick, to-day, before any knowledge leaks out and reaches them. But they are suspicious; they mistrust me. You are their friend; they place in you absolute confidence. Go to them, buy up all purchasable ground at the lowest possible figure. Come to me; I will pay, overpay you, \$5,000, \$10,000, \$50,000, \$100,000—to-night will be your reward. Be a man! Will you?"

Delane moved close to Stewart expectantly, his hand extended. Marshall stepped back; their eyes met.

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The one, Delane, was forty-five, prematurely old, gray-haired; deep stern lines aged his face; the lips were drooped with furrows of cruelty and avarice; the eyes were cold, unfriendly; the body weakened by the indulgence of every appetite, a devotee to passion, a slave to every impulse, a bow without a string, a ship without a rudder. dissipated, crippled, mentally and physically a wreck, helpless, he must seek succor of others.

The other, Stewart, was not twenty-five, his features were kind, full of sympathy, his eyes dark, brilliant with the light of activity; his form powerful, for passion, impulse had been starved and dwarfed under the influence of his masterful control. The greatness of his body, the strength of his mentality was fathomless; it could not be limited. As they looked one at the other, they saw not the surface alone; they read each the soul of the other. The gauntlet was thrown, the challenge accepted. A conflict was initiated that would be waged to the bitter finish, when with unflinching gaze Marshall, with subdued wrath smouldering in his breast, replied to Delane's inquiry in a deep unquestionable "No."

He then returned quietly to his labor on the books at the desk.

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CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH A DARKENED LENS.

MARSHALL STEWART tightened the cinch-straps, lengthened the stirrups, and sprang into the saddle with the carelessness of a herder years experienced. Since his arrival in Lone barely two months previous, Marshall had taken long rides every morning before working hours—to put it more truthfully, before sunrise. He often said that it delighted him to scamper over the prairies like a frightened hare; he enjoyed being abroad when everyone else was sleeping. Nature, the retiring of night, the dawn of day and the awakening of the buds and grasses, held for him an enchantment not arousable in every character.

It was early in the morning, the first week in August, some time after four, the sun being already up, and through the dense, sullen fog enveloping the valleys, appearing as a golden misty haze. The sky was clear, excepting a stray stratus cloud, hung merely over the horizon or mayhap some scattered cirrus flitting over the cerulean arch. The air was cold, this being due entirely to the humidity of the surrounding atmosphere, for the season had been hot. The trail was indistinct in the uncertain light; no sound was audible, save the fall of the horse's hoofs, beating an even muffled measure on the trodden mat of grass. A field lark darted through the dim vapor which was rising sluggishly, disclosing reluctantly the summits of the nearest hills.

Stewart had just reached the base of Bradley hill, and was about to begin its ascent, as he desired to have the

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best possible view of the bordering lands that was attainable from the top of this elevation, when he heard the sound of horse's hoofs following close in the trail behind him. Turning in his saddle, through the heavy and scarcely penetrable air he was able to distinguish Kathleen and Bobbie (who had become favorably acquainted) a few yards away. He checked his horse and waited for her; they had not had a chat for some time, as he had not seen her since his return from Canada two days earlier.

"A perfect day, a good old horse, and a fair rider," said Marshall, admiring Kathleen with open candor. Never did she look to him more beautiful. During his absence in Winnipeg he had carried in his heart a memory picture of her, of her blue eyes, the fleeting gleams of gold in her light brown hair, the sweetness of her lips and smile. But as he saw her again, it came to him vividly how utterly and hopelessly he had failed in his mind recollection of her.

"I was just going to go up the hill," he said. "Let us ride up together."

She reined Bobbie up alongside his horse, Giczar. The latter was a coal black animal, full-limbed, with flowing mane and tail. He had been transported from the Thistle Ranch early in the season, and indeed was an acquisition to any ranch.

With assurance the horses commenced to climb the acclivity, making a winding route through the tall dry grass, evading with the greatest caution the huge boulders, and the ground holes, which had been made by burrowing animals.

"What a view!" said Kathleen with animation, when they had gained the summit, and were looking eagerly at

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the landscape before them—acres and acres of rugged prairie, buried in a snowy sea of fog, that was rolling up and on like masses of white smoke or ocean foam, spreading in bewildering distances about them.

"How this would look from Cactus Point! We could see out upon the Flat from that position," added Marshall.

Kathleen still gazed enraptured, watching the vapor rise slowly from the low places, and the small shacks strugglingly emerge from the moist embrace. Stewart looked at her longingly; her face flushed with a rich color, her eyes bright, her disobedient hair blowing over her cheek mischievously, proved to him a picture far more irresistible than the view.

She turned to him. "I don't feel myself away up here, and looking far down there." She pointed a white finger toward a remote valley. "I don't feel human."

Marshall glanced in the direction indicated. "It affected me the same way too at first, but, of late, all has changed. I have been transformed." He was referring in his own mind to Kathleen's influence. "I too am human, too much so I fear. Every day I find the world becomes more material, life more practical; even existence is gained only by a hand to hand struggle with stern reality."

"How pessimistic you have grown, and I had laid out so many hopeful plans for us while you were gone. How we would aid these poor settlers here and mitigate their sufferings. A severe winter is predicted. Were you aware, Mr. Stewart, that they say many will be hungry before spring?" There was a low tremor in Kathleen's voice, which Marshall could not fail to detect. But she regained at once and went on bravely. "It is horrible to contemplate; one can scarcely conceive of a greater mis-

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fortune, to be starving, cold." She was patting Bobbie's neck tenderly. Marshall liked the picture; he often recalled it in after years.

"It is these things that have forced me into a gloomy state of mind, I sometimes think. There is so much to be accomplished, and the work is so prodigious, and it is almost hopeless. Then the eternal greed of the rich is so nauseating. And when one has to fight it all practically alone."

"Did I not pledge you alliance?" Kathleen asked, playfully.

Marshall stammered and colored, her gentle reprimand embarrassed him; he was never wholly composed when in her presence. "Yes, with you, both of us can and will succeed. But alone I would be a helpless failure, I think," answered Stewart, doubtfully.

"You could never be anything but a success; you and failure are not synonymous." She spoke with feeling; he did not look at her but she saw his face plainly. As she spoke the words it came to her that his features changed; courage, ambition, perseverance grew out more definitely in the strong lines. He was to her as when she had the first sight of him. Masterful, possessing power without limit, resources undrainable were reserved within him; no end was beyond his reach.

"I hope you are correct in your confidence as to my success," he said, pushing back a lock of heavy hair from his forehead, where it persisted in falling down rebelliously. "But at times the undertaking assumes colossal dimensions. I feel as though I were standing at the foot of a majestic mountain, while dense storm clouds wreathed that monarch's stately summits; the sky is black; not one ray of light flashes over the tenebrous surface; mad winds

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rush from their prisons and their roaring is echoed in the hollow caves. Shall I ascend? No doubt those tottering avalanches will overwhelm me, the storm clouds burst and hurl down their merciless weapons, the angry winds cast me from some fragile crag. And"—Marshall smiled with apology at his companion—"I am not very strong, am I? or the temptation of surrender would not come to me—at least not before the fight had opened." He looked at her, hoping a reply, but she was silent, seemingly thinking.

"The sun is well up. Shall we go down?" he asked after a brief pause.

Kathleen unheeding his last words (perhaps they did not reach her), replied, "No. We all have weak moments—periods of despondency and gloom; seasons when hope vanishes and black despair glares into our faces, whichever way we turn. It requires a full armored warrior to drive away such an enemy, and when he does, that man to me is a hero. But if he fails, allowing himself to be overcome by obstacles, and refuses to arise again and renew the battle determinedly, he is not a man."

Marshall looked into Kathleen's eyes; there was in them a pugnacious fire suddenly kindled, she had revealed to him a side of her nature before wholly undiscovered. She smiled encouragingly.

"But you are a hero; if you should succumb it would be under only the most aggravating pressure; some force outside of yourself will overcome you, for the elements within you could never yield. You would come up to renew the struggle more gloriously than ever. Experience would prove a severe though valuable teacher to you."

Kathleen's confidence in Stewart made him sanguine, "In my opinion you would never be overcome by circum-

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stances. You possess a great, strong yet sensitive soul incapable of being veered."

"I comprehend the reality of life fully, I think" she said, unheeding his words "But I am always able to pick out a faint glimmer of light in the deepest darkness. The roses may be snatched away, but their perfume will linger; the past may be calloused and rusted, but we may still possess the sweetness of reminiscences. Friends may prove untrue or desert us, yet we will always cherish in memory, departed pleasurable companionships. But if all this fails we are still alive, can breathe God's air, and live. That alone is sufficient."

"Do you ever think you might regret being alive, that something unavoidable, something for which you were fully irresponsible, might be thrust upon you uninvited; and then that non-existence might be preferable?"

"How gloomy you are?" said Kathleen. She had been looking at the horizon and clouds and fields, knowing a tremendous joy of life and happiness, but when he had finished she turned toward him suddenly: "Is there some external object evading you or is it some unseen force hindering your highest development?"

Impulsiveness, generated in his blood for many ages past from Celtic ancestry flamed up; he made a sudden movement toward her, but checked himself and restrained the words of love which were framed in his mind and had almost forced themselves to his lips. He turned away quickly. "Come let us go down." But his voice was not natural.

The descent was arduous, the horses worked their way down the precipitous sides of the hill with care, planting their feet more securely on the more unlevel ground. They had gone about half the distance perhaps, and Kath-

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leen was enjoying the peril of descent with almost childish glee, when her horse, Bobbie, stumbled into a deep ground hole that was concealed, as the tall grass had grown over it, and Kathleen was thrown from her horse with alarming suddenness.

In an instant Stewart was by her side. He found she was uninjured, only a slight bruise on her left hand, of small account, and her waist had been torn on the horn of her saddle.

"I am not hurt," she said laughingly, to assure him she was safe. "Poor Bobbie! It must have proved a dreadful shock to him," she added.

Stewart did not answer. She glanced at him, and he was watching her, his face white, his dark eyes glowing with unnatural brilliancy, but he did not say anything. Kathleen looked away. After a brief time she raised her eyes to him a second time. She hoped he would speak, but there was a long silence, during which Kathleen gave her attention to anything, all things but Marshall; she feared to turn her gaze to him again. After a long pause, she burst out: "Oh, Marshall what is the trouble? Why don't you speak to me?" Then his eyes softened; the stern, mysterious light in them faded. Another time the temptation seized him to tell her how he loved her, how she enkindled in him every highest thought, ambition for noble things. He did not speak at once, but came close to her and threw himself down beside her on the grass. She had taken off her hat; the morning wind was playing coyly with her golden tinted hair; but she did not talk to Stewart nor did she venture to look at him again. One small, soft, white hand was temptingly near his, so he moved his own away.

"Kathleen," his voice was soft though exceedingly calm

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now. "I want to tell you something. Perhaps you may not care to hear. Perhaps when I have finished you may be sorry I spoke; but I feel you must know. It may comfort you some time; it will comfort me now. I love you, Kathleen; I have known it a long time. You may not care for me. I will not even ask you if you care. I will not strive to have you care. It is enough to know I love you, and that that love, pure, holy and ennobling as it is, with which you have ignited my heart and soul and mind, will never be extinguished. It shall have upon me an idealizing influence; it will last forever."

He arose, and he looked into her eyes; they were open with astonishment. He faltered nearly, but his lips were pressed tightly together, his head was thrown back with a movement of determination. How he longed to take her hand in both of his—only a moment. It would prove a hopeful memory for the future. Instead he extended his hand coldly, business-like. Her fingers trembled as they touched his. Her eyes—he would never forget their expression—gazed supplicatingly into his own. Good-bye, Kathleen, I hope you will be happy with him." His voice was steady, almost cold. "But remember you will possess forever my love, imperishable." His foot was in the stirrup, and he was in the saddle—gone.

Kathleen watched the departing figure, bewildered. If he would only glance back just once; but a cloud of dust rolling up behind concealed him from her gazing.

She understood. The blue bow of ribbon, the true lover's knot, Southland's bow, lay exposed over her heart where her waist had been torn as she fell from her horse.

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CHAPTER VIII.

A PIONEER.

"WHAT dress will I wear to-night, ma? Will I wear my blue percale, with the white piping, or shall I try and get this one done? Oh, I hate to sew any longer. I will be so tired out I won't be able to enjoy myself. It's awful exciting to git ready for any doings; then when one is trying to fix up something to wear it makes it more exciting. Don't you think so, ma." Mayme Richards paused in her work of finishing her ball dress, and the goods fell from her listless hands onto the bare floor.

"Now, Mayme, oh Mayme! Pick that there up quick; you'll spoil it. It's ruined! shrieked Mrs. Blair, staring with abject horror at the "custum" of tan lawn lying at her daughter's feet. "Oh, Mayme, you are so careless. Who do you think will ever marry you? What man do you suppose would want his wife to sit there doin' nothin', when he was expecting her to fix up a dress to have to wear to a swell ball? Mayme, how ken you be so shiftless? What man do you suppose would want a wife of his to be so stupid as to ruin the stuff he'd worked hard and bought for her, so she could look nice in, to see it a-lying on the floor and not take it up? Do you think you'll ever catch Jimmie Murphy if you keep going on that way? How do you suppose I managed to git married twice? Well, first, I always had a pretty dress to put on when I went to a party or goings on with a feller. He always feels a sort of pride to hev the girl he takes look better than the girls the other boys takes. So I al-

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ways made it a point to hev a pretty dress; then I was always busy. I never set around idle and letting the work fall out of my hands. A man never likes to see his wife idle; he always tries to keep her a-going you see. And how do you think I came to get Gulch Jack to propose?"

"Gracious! Ma! You hain't landed him too, have you? Oh, say, isn't it grand!" Mayme's eyes and mouth were opened wide with surprise, yet pleasure.

"Yes, he asked me last night"—a vivid red blush shone through the woman's dark skin. It was tanned and hardened by outside labor and exposure. "I was out feedin' the pigs and he had just come in from the ranch; he and Delane had been out there prospectin', he comes up and stands and watches me silent; then when I empties a big pail of swill—you know that biggest pail—to them six old white hogs in the south pen, he said, 'Gee, but yer ken work! I tell yer, Mrs. Blair, a man likes ter see a woman what isn't afraid ter git up and git. You're the one fer a feller's wife.' Then I went up to him and I puts my arms around his neck and said, 'Any time, Jack; you are the third, but I likes you better than the other two. Not that I would say anythin' disrespectful of my other husbands, but they wasn't much account. You are so noble.' Then I looked into his eyes or tried to, but he looked away. He acted kind of awkward like; I had expected him to kiss me, but he didn't. I'll bring him around to that before long. So you see, Mayme, the only way to catch them and haul them in is to work *always* and look pretty. A man likes to see a woman who works *always*. Now you've got a wise mother's advice, and if you don't take it and land one soon, it isn't my fault. Now git to work."

Say, Ma, what's the matter with this skirt? It don't

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look just right. It seems to be longer in the front than it is on the sides and back, and I don't think the ruffle is just straight; it seems too wide in front and too narrow behind. Ma, do you think I will look as nice as Kitty Night? She's a mighty swell looking girl when she's dressed up."

"Oh, Mayme, you make me tired. Do you know her nose is so long for the rest of her face and then she *always* wears that same dress. She has had that blue silk as long as I can recollect."

"But it's pretty, Ma. It matches her eyes so nicely, too."

"Yes, but your dress just sets off your beauty so, it's a nice soft yellow color; it ain't tan, you know; it's a pretty yellow like your hair, and it's so becoming."

Kathleen, at this juncture, entered the bedroom where Mayme and Mrs. Blair were sewing and hopelessly struggling with the mismatched pieces of the girl's dress.

"Can you help me out with this, Kathleen? I am all mixed up with it. I want to git it finished to-night."

Kathleen recalled how eagerly as a child she had worked and planned for whole families of dolls, but now she received the cloth from Mayme's hand reluctantly.

It was the last week in October, and Kathleen had sunk into a deep lassitude. The first month after Stewart's departure she passed feverishly. There were periods of anticipation and expectancy, periods of restlessness and hopeful despair. But these had passed, and a season of weariness had taken possession of her. She lost interest in others; in herself. The last week in September she wrote a letter to her father, begging permission to return home; but she never sent it, she destroyed it. Of late Marshall's absence weighed more heavily

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upon her; his silence oppressed her. She had heard nothing from him; she did not know where he was. There had been a report circulated that he had gone to Colorado among the miners in a mining camp. This was denied by a later rumor, however. That was the only little she could glean, and that little was exceedingly vague and extremely unsatisfactory and uncomfortable. Usually she was indifferent and satisfied in her inactive state, but sometimes she realized that the channel into which she permitingly allowed herself to be drawn was subtly dangerous. She was fast becoming useless and idle.

As she took the skirt from Mayme, she noticed for the first time how hard and calloused were the young girl's big hands. The fingers had been made by nature artistically slender, but labor, hard masculine labor, had blunted the formerly rounded tips. She glanced into the girl's face; a pang of sorrow, a feeling of negligence, of neglected duty came to her. Then her thoughts reverted to Marshall Stewart's comment—"You will have to live with the people and live as they do to fully understand their condition."

Those words kept her awake nearly all that night; each syllable burned itself into her brain, her heart, her conscience; it was like the resonance of some ponderous gong, whose volume of sound, reverberating and echoing, penetrates the auditory nerve so violently that its tone lingers long after the initial sound has been lost in the air.

So it occurred that early in the morning succeeding her sleepless night, she went across the Soo tracks, over to Russian town, selected a small area of ground, purchased it, and ordered the carpenters to begin the erection of a house at once. It was to be twelve by sixteen feet, the same size as the shacks of her nearest neighbor, Sher-

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rivouchmoot, a man who "owned" a family of eight children and a wife, and whose sister and three little ones also occupied the same roof—fourteen in all.

By evening Kathleen's home—she felt a certain peculiar comfort in calling the crudely builded little shack home—was completed. The interior was clean, with the freshness of newness, and the pine boards still carried the resinous odor of the forest.

There was one narrow window, to the east. It gave one an unobstructed view across miles and acres of rolling range, an occasional stubblefield, and a few stacks of flax and wheat straw. To the south was a broad low door, over which the slanting roof fell suddenly. It afforded a glimpse of the town over the charcoal covered car-tracks. To the north, at some distance, had been a small lake, but the water was dried up, and nothing but a white bed of bitter alkali remained. To the west, very close but a few yards from the house, was a fresh spring, whose clear cool water bubbled up with ceaselessness. Beyond this were the mud and dung huts of the foreigners—Russians—into whose midst Kathleen had come, determined to follow Stewart's suggestion, "to live with the people and as they do."

Kathleen went to bed early. The hard board bunk, set up high from the floor on four heavy wooden crossed beams, was not such as would invite welcoming sleep; but the girl was exhausted, and fell almost immediately into a calm untroubled rest, from which she did not awaken for several hours.

It must have been the rattling of the iron latch in the door, or the force of the wind descending through the stovepipe, which aroused her. She awoke suddenly. A full round moon, now nearing the western horizon, was

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gleaming silently into the small room, casting shining shadows of dancing brightness over the dark coverings of the bed. Kathleen raised herself on her elbow ; the unobstructed rays of the moon spread a glistening splendor of light over her shimmering hair, which lay in thick braids down her back, and fell in soft caressing waves over her brow. She gazed pensively at the night.

The wind, shrieking around the corners of her roughly constructed home, even penetrating into the cracks and crevices of the walls of her dwelling, did not frighten her. The howling of six or eight gray yelping wolves, whose lean bodies were reflected in long tall shadows on the shadeless ground, but a few rods from her door, did not intimidate her. She watched their hungry gait with child-like interest, "which not having tasted danger knows no fear," until they were concealed from sight behind a near-by hill.

She did not go to sleep again at once. She was thinking. The cold air which precedes the dawn chilled her, as she sat, shivering yet unheeding its contact. She was experiencing a thrill of heroism in this self-denial, solitude. Her thoughts of Stewart, her longing to see him, her desire to be near him, found expression and plausible relief in carrying out the projects he had formulated. He, his influence, though absent, linked her womanly attributes—sweetness, sincerity and love, with strength, courage and ambition, which only a powerful soul like Stewart's is able to transmit by proximity to another. She was woman at heart, man in courage, the whole composite tipped with an angel sweetness as she undertook her work, Stewart's work.

By Friday night, she had been in the settlement three days, and had made herself acquainted with the condi-

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tions and resources of the twelve families residing there. Of that number four had sufficient provisions for themselves, and perhaps a small surplus; four (if the winter was mild) might hope to sustain life, a meagre allowance only being allotted each one of coffee, potatoes and black bread; two would be provided for until late in January; the remaining two were already in most destitute circumstances.

She sat alone in her shack that night, apparently watching the flickering shadows cast by the firelight, dancing over the floor and the wooden ceiling. But her mind was alert; she was planning. She must work out some method to distribute the necessary food to these one hundred people during the coming winter. Meanwhile she would live on potatoes, coffee and black bread, as her neighbors were compelled to do. She would live among them in her shanty—alone.

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CHAPTER IX.

LASSOED.

"THREE beers and nine straight whiskies ter yer credit ter-night, Stewart. Yer will soon beat the whole bunch. That's a sonny. Yer'se bin goin' it some of late, boy. Took a long time ter git yer on the trail, didn't it, boys? I worked harder on breakin' yer in than ever I did on the peskiest buckin' broncho I ever seed. I'd jest git yer started out with the bunch, think yer were goin' along straight when I'd diskiver yer off the trail, hikin' it off across the range somewhar. I'd git after yer, fetch yer in on the round-up and, by gosh! if yer didn't git away again sometimes between drinks. Three beers and nine straight whiskies yer tally up ter-night, Stewart. Four hundred dollars sunk in keerds, still playin' and drinkin' like the devil! I'll bet yer one hundred dollars 'gainst the skeeriest critter yer've got on the range, boys, that Stewart's game! I won't have to throw my lariat after him agin, and corral him after ter-night. What do yer tout on him, pards?"

The room was a small dingy one, lighted only by a lantern, whose flame glowed most uncertainly through a cracked, smoky chimney, and lit up the objects in the room with indistinctness.

Stewart, with three other men, was sitting at a large square board table that stood in the darkest corner of the small room. Empty bottles lay around the floor, full ones without corks were on the table, and foaming glasses stood at each man's place; cigar stubs and burnt matches

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added to the debris; the air was thick with the odor of smoke.

"Yer are punchin' the booze ter-night like a cuss, Stew-art. Go it double quick, pard. Life's mighty unsartin' though yer're only a young steer. Who knows yer might be marketed afore ter-morrow night's round-up!"

"No, I won't touch another card to-night; I mean it, boys." Marshall spoke with his same old determination. "My money is all gone—my last cent."

His face was thin and haggard; large beads of perspiration stood on his broad forehead, and his dark hair fell in thick wet plaits over it. His eyes were heavy, his voice abnormally loud. "Good-night, boys," he smiled, it was the same old fascinating smile, but so pathetic.

"Ye're unsaddlin' pretty early, hain't yer? It's only two."

"Showin' up ter-morrow, don't yer?"

"I don't think I will ever come here again; you men have ruined me."

"Damn yer tanned hide!" Eight steady hands were on as many blue-fires. "To the devil with yer preachin'! If yer wasn't a yearling calf jest taken from yer mother I'd brand yer so dep yer'd never git over the sting of the iron. We all liked yer ter the first, Marshall, and was willin' ter hold our ears up ter yer talkin' erbout God and the other fellers, but yer fell down yerself, got mixin' in keerds and liquor, and the devil couldn't hold yer. A man don't think he's goin' ter hev the herd take after his hoofs and follow his foot-path when he don't always carry his bell ter his own tune. We wanted ter follow yer, pard, 'twas jest like changin' saddles with the boys every day. We always had to buckle up differently each morning. Yer wasn't steady; one day yer war dead

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drunk, next yer war preachin' us a blue rippin' sermon; but them two things don't harness up tergether, sonny; one or 'tother had ter be unhitched. So yer jest cut out the religion yerself and don't yer cuss us."

"Stewart'll turn up ter-morrow night all right. Yer couldn't hold him off with a mile of blue-fires, not on a bet."

"How do yer know?"

Jennie Kilbar lands up from Broadhead in the morning. She's sure ter be at the ball at Cassimero's."

Marshall had reached the door, but he paused there a moment. "Is that true? I had not heard she was coming."

A volume of maudlin laughter arose. "Stewart never took ter wimmen much; all yer fellers have got yer sweets. But I recollect he war all honey ter Jennie at the last Broncho ball. She war skeery, too, as a yearling. She war the youngest heifer in the round-up that night, only seventeen. Pretty little honeysuckle, too. Stewart led her 'round through them dance steps keerful as could be. Don't yer recollect fellers? She war his pard most every set. Dainty little thing. Stewart's mighty lucky, boys, if he trots her 'round with him all through life. Picture him, sonnies, with her corralled on some fancy spot on the range, bunching his own little heifers and steers, a dozen or more 'round him at night, waking in the morning off on the trail early to feed the critters. 'Nough ter make yer jealous, ain't it, boys? But Stewart's out-rid yer fellers; she's sweet on him, all straight. Yer're all cow-punchers, that's sure, but the feller that put it over the others for the gals here has got ter rattle his spurs mighty clear, and ki-hi louder than the other

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cusses, if he wants ter trap his game. Stewart's got yer beat, boys, but he's done his work straight."

* * * * *

Marshall Stewart and Jennie Kilbar started to the dance at Cassimero's the following night. Jennie had come up from Broadhead on the N. P., and was stopping with her sister, Mrs. Bradmore, on a farm about two miles out in the country. Marshall went to the farm about six in the evening, had supper with the family, and he and Jennie started to walk to Cassimero's at about seven o'clock. The distance along the main road was two miles; there was, however, a cut recently opened up across Nelson's wheat field—the one near the house—that saved a half mile of walking. But there was also a third way, the only one ten or twelve years previous that was used, but that had been abandoned two or three years ago, when the other and shorter route had been laid out. This was longer by two miles, it was a circuitous way, winding in and out among the hills, falling in abrupt grades down into the level lands, circling about grain fields, passing by springs, running along the side of Wolf Den Gulch and leading up to the battered door of a deserted shack. It was a lonesome course; but there was a beautiful romantic witchery about it, and the young couple chose this path.

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CHAPTER X.

ON THE RANCH.

THE last of April Kathleen decided to give up her residence in Lone and go out to Delane's ranch, Distant View, for the summer. The winter had been more successful than she had dared to anticipate. By careful management, using the greater portion of her own allowance from home, she had been able to provide sufficiently for the twelve poor families in the town, who would have been in want without her assistance. She cared for the sick, also taught their children in spare moments.

"Thank you, John," said Kathleen with a smile, as she took the dish of potatoes from one of the hands. The big fellow, unaccustomed to kindness, blushed vividly and moved in his chair awkwardly.

When Kathleen first came to Distant View, the help viewed her with eyes of distrust. She was Delane's niece; she would share with him his prejudices, and ally herself with him in his persecutions of them. In this they were mistaken. At the close of the first two weeks she had secured their complete confidence. Under severest protestation from Delane, who insisted she would not eat at the same table with those dirty Russian dogs, she appeared at every meal with them, and at night, after working hours, entered into long conversations with the men—Russians, Finns, Swedes, Germans, succeeding in drawing out from each the varied story of the simple yet interesting life of each individual.

There was Big Willie, the shepherd; Christ, the cow-

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boy; Little Willie, garden and house boy; besides Jerry, Matti, Dorr, John, Valentine, Johnnie, Fred and Ole, all farm hands. Little by little she drew out from these their history, in broken English, mixed with the rich melody of their native tongues.

Big Willie—Billy, Delane persisted was a more appropriate appellation, more in keeping with his position—came of Scandinavian parents, an honest, sincere boy in whom conscience had laid the rigid rules of right with distinctness. A deceitful or ignoble act could not be associated with him. When a boy of fifteen, he left his home in Sweden and came to America, intending to make a fortune and return to his parents with money enough to provide for them when they grew old. He told Kathleen all about it one night. She was by her window in the sitting room; the window was open and he was outside. How everyone had laughed at his best efforts to speak his adopted language; how some mocked his strange dialect, others ridiculed his foreign apparel, until living became almost unbearable. He related, too, how he labored in a shipping plant in Omaha for eighteen months, until his health failed. Giving up work, he remained with a friend two months. "And now I work for your uncle," he concluded, with an accent that was quaint yet pleasing to Kathleen.

With difficulty she extracted from Christ the narrative of his brief life. By nature retiring, he hesitated in divulging to the girl his history. After a month, however, throwing aside his reserve, he exposed to her a heart teeming with exaggerated integrity, powerful ambitions and desires, that his shackled existence could scarcely hope to realize. The girl gave eager attention, as the boy poured into her ears the secret longings of his soul. "I

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am a Russian"—the soft, rich, musical voice verified his confession. "My father was a drunkard, he was killed in a drunken fight four years ago. I have worked as a slave since I was ten years old. Perhaps it is wrong, but I want to be someone; I am only a cowboy. I am not an animal, I am a man. I have a heart, a man's heart. I want to do something. My God! am I wrong?"

The boy placed his hand on his breast with a dramatic movement, and the light in the clear gray eyes spoke with an eloquence words could never convey.

Dorr was a jolly, good-natured man; one who would prove an industrious, helpful neighbor. Two years previous he left Russia under most unusual conditions, having paid a Jew four roubles to conceal him in a mammoth grain sack, and dump him over the border. It was a risky venture for both Dorr and his preserver; but the plan worked.

John Schauer was granted the title of being the best man on the ranch, a big strapping fellow, steady, conscientious, submissive, easily cowed by Delane's piercing eye, he was a slave to the slightest wish of his employer. For five years he had been the only support of a widowed mother and six younger sisters, managing to keep the girls at home and in school, though the work at times threatened to fall through.

Toward the middle of May, Matti joined the corps of men at the ranch; he came to help with the seeding. But thirty-six years old, his face and form carried the appearance of a man twenty years his senior. His cheeks were sunken, the skin bronzed and dry, while his scanty hair stood out in stiff, dry tufts on his head, and his eyebrows were entirely missing.

He was a forlorn figure, sitting on the curbing of the

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spring-house. The old brown hat which had become a part of him, faded into red patches by the hot sun, was drawn over his face, and one strand of his harsh hair protruded through a hole in the crown.

Kathleen went over to him, seating herself beside him. It was his first night.

"Are you lonesome?" she asked, gazing kindly into the sad face.

He looked astonishment. Why was the girl interested in him?

"A leetle," he answered briefly.

"Have you a wife?"

"Yees."

"Any children?"

"No, we have been married a leetle more than ten months."

"Have you been in America long?"

"Yees, twenty years."

"Do you like the Americans?"

"Yees, I leeke them pretty much, but I don't leeke them other 'nalities, not a leetle."

"Have you any money?"

"Only a leetle. I had \$4,000 once, but I was seeck, pretty seeck, in a beeg ceety, for two years. It was a leetle more than \$40 a week. I had no money when I come out. You know in a beeg ceety to be seeck, a beeg ceety, it costs pretty much. I make all money with my hands, you understand, my hands?" Matti held up his outstretched hands before the girl. "I work with them pretty much, ever sence I was leetle."

Kathleen looked at the hands, hard as flint, the fingers twisted out of shape, the nails broken, deep scars also disfigured the palms.

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"I save a leetle. I got one horse, three cows and a leetle house. But I be seeck sometime again; maybe then that go too, I think pretty much."

"I will talk with you again, Matti. To-morrow night." Kathleen was so moved by the pathetic sight that she wanted to get away.

"I leeke you to come pretty good. I don't be lonesome, only a leetle, when you talk to me. Nobody thinks of me, only look to see when I work pretty much. Friday I was seeck a leetle. I leeft too much, I think. My backey hurt me, I loosed a joint in my backey, I think. But no one care for me. You make me happy pretty much. You think a little some." The man, puffing away vigorously at his smoky pipe, watched Kathleen as she went down the cattle lane to see Christ and John. "A pretty neece leetle geer!; I leeke her pretty much."

Within a few weeks Kathleen discovered there was an antagonism existing among the help. Finn was unfriendly to Swede, Swede to German, and all bore almost a malicious hatred to the Russian laborers. Her motive was to eradicate this enmity by the swiftest and surest method. How could it be accomplished? She must awaken in them some common interest.

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CHAPTER XI.

PROGENITORS.

It was May; and though it was early evening, a calm spring sun still hung in the heavens, shining from a cloudless sky. Near the west gate of the west pasture, that opened out upon the Flat, stood Kathleen. It was her first visit in that direction since she came to Distant View. Acres and acres of green level prairie lands extended to the west, and stretched out towards the north in bewildering distances. There were large areas of plowed ground, whose rich black soil lay in even furrows against the wheat-fields just sprouting.

Some heads of stock were feeding near the border of the Flat where the level country met the slowly rising surface of the rolling lands. Many teams were working in the fields; the merry whistle of the plow-boy sounded clear on the evening air. A gray plover, whose slim legs appeared scarcely able to support the thin body, perched on a large flat stone. A flock of black birds, dyed with touches of mellow yellow or rich red, sang in a well-trained chorus from a position on a nearby fence. Gophers followed the uneven trail, or kept vigil with bold mockery to their homes. A fat badger waddled to his hole; dropping down backwards, he saucily protruded a sleek head; suddenly as a dog approached he disappeared, throwing up the earth in big mounds above him. The chirp of a sleepy young bird was audible; a night hawk settled in the trail or swooped about in the air aimlessly. A haziness pervaded the atmosphere, as the sun, almost

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setting, nestled close to the earth. Eight or more teams passed Kathleen; the draft animals walked along leisurely, their heads down, the eyes half-closed with contentment, in anticipation of their well-earned rest. They broke into a trot as each came in view of home. Heavy white smoke arose from the chimneys of the several houses, circled low above the roofs for a time, then vanished in a light vapor into the clear sky. In the distance—fifteen miles distant, perhaps—in clear relief against the blue sky, was visible the white steeple of a church, the windows stained blue and red; these, catching the golden rays of the descending sun, glowed, reflecting opal and dull ruby lights. Calmly, serenely, the glittering cross gleamed in the fading sunset. There was lowing of cattle, the drum of the wild fowl, the voice of the country boy singing in full round tones. "Mein Liebchen, Mein Liebchen." The sun was below the horizon. All was still.

Kathleen mounted her horse, looked once more at the neatly built and trimly painted houses, that were snuggled together every fourth or half mile in neighborly friendliness. What a contrast to Distant View, where thousands and thousands of acres reached out miles and miles on every side. That domain stood alone; it was a solitary world by itself. Why was it that settlers had not come there within its boundaries? On one occasion Kathleen had ventured to ask, and Delane had answered:

"That is something which should not interest you in the least and does not concern you in the slightest degree. You have affairs enough of your own to manage and don't interfere in mine." Delane glared at his niece. "I have warned you, youngster, your head is growing too fast, too many brains don't agree with women, and the sooner you mind my words the better it will be for you,

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young miss. I can make it mighty uncomfortable for you here, kid. You will have to behave, and not trouble either me or my business, or it's home you will go and marry Southland. How would that fit your ladyship?" The steel blue eyes were glowering, the mouth was a straight hard line, the chin was cruel.

Ignoring the growl, and trying to disarm him, Kathleen continued: "But why don't settlers come here, uncle?"

"Girl, how many times will I be compelled to tell you to not mix in other people's affairs. Several times I told you those hogs of Russians were unfit to eat with, yet I have been informed that during my absence you sat at the table with them every meal. It was incredible until this morning when I requested you to wait; you had the brazen audacity to tell me you enjoyed eating with them, besides, you added, they appreciated it so much, and it seemed a pity to deprive them of that small pleasure."

"There is homestead land here, isn't there, uncle?"

"Furthermore, I understand when *Billy*" (Delane emphasized the name unnecessarily, as Kathleen always called him Willie, and the other hands had followed her leading) "was kicked by Hart, you bathed the wound in his head and dressed it daily, too. Nice thing for you, my niece, Delane's niece, Delane, the multi-millionaire—to do, isn't it? When Matti was hurt you cared for him, treated his eye for several days. How could you do it? Put your hands on his withered old face! Touch him, the filthy devil!" Delane's countenance conveyed his disgust; words were not really necessary.

"It gave me great pleasure to relieve his sufferings," said Kathleen, simply. "The country over to the west is thickly populated. Would it not be possible to people this land also?"

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"Besides I have forbidden you, and my word is law, to talk with the men; you wholly ignore my commands. Yesterday I saw you talking with Christ, the day before it was John, and last evening Matti. You see I am keeping a pretty close watch on you. What will people say if they hear my niece, Delane's niece, is visiting with my help, making Delane their associate, in a word? You are disgracing me. Do you know who I am? I am Delane, millionaire, banker, cattle king, master of Distant View. What would Benson think, or Gillen, if it should reach them, that my niece, Delane's niece, nursed and befriended these foreign brutes, the scum of all Europe! Gillen is a gentleman; your friends are damned idiots."

Kathleen looked at Delane, and a flame of indignation lighted the blue eyes. It was the same look she had given her father when he insisted she must marry Southland. It was intensified now. "They are gentlemen. Gentlemen do not indulge in profanity when speaking to ladies." It was a satiric reference to Delane's violence of language when aroused to anger. "Gentlemen do not partake of intoxicants, gentlemen do not jeopardize other's lives. Only Wednesday, Gillen fired three shots at Pipely, when he came to claim a reward that had been offered for lost stock returned. Gillen is a good marksman too, but the shots went wild, for he was intoxicated. The working-men here, my friends and my people, are honest, truthful and virtuous. I would place my life in their hands and I know I would be uninjured."

"It is nothing but the virtue of ignorance they possess. Gillen is educated; he has travelled, he is broad minded; he has money, he has family, he has everything; he can go among the best, and society will receive him in its

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arms, embrace him, where these country louts couldn't show their faces."

"Money, money, money!" retorted Kathleen. "It is nothing but money. I can almost hear the cold metallic clink. How one's money is accumulated, how one's money is spent is never questioned. If the man has money, that alone is sufficient. It opens all doors to him, makes him a power everywhere, in the social, commercial or political world. Gillen's father bought a seat in the upper house some twenty years ago, didn't he? Gillen himself is now operating a political machine to advance his interests here; it is fully systemized, manipulated along carefully planned lines. Gillen speaks and every man, each a petty hireling, obeys; the instrument controlling practically all the affairs of everyone in North Dakota pushes forward automatically; each man in his place goes on sustaining this mammoth mechanism. Why? Because the man behind the tools, thrusts some money into his pockets, perhaps grants him a trivial social prestige. Meanwhile the machine completes its duty; putting usually the right man in the right office. Gillen spent a small fortune last fall to get Judson into office. Everyone knows there is not another in all Logan country possessing the aggregated vices and trickeries of that man. He is a recognized cheat. You also supported him. Opposing was McCumber, in your own words, 'a young man with a life's record as clean as an unwritten page.' His conscience was too Puritanic. He might expose some of the frauds, he would menace the ring's future progress. McCumber was elected." Delane chewed on his cigar in wrathful silence, and Kathleen continued:

"Intellectually Gillen is a success. When struggling for a cause he skillfully brings into play every faculty, work-

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ing upon the less instructed minds with a persuasiveness and false sincerity that is rarely detected. He assumes a mock interest in the people, becomes solicitous of their welfare, imposes an intimacy which to the observer is both ridiculous and insulting. Visiting their homes, he joins in their mild recreations with dilated zeal. The result is surprising. The master mind sways its victims with its erudition as a ship is rocked in a storm. His keenness and intrigue work upon their most impressionable minds until they become intoxicated with the supream influence. His cause is won.

"As to family, its sweeping degeneracy may be traced back for many generations readily. Theirs is a story of corruptions and pollutions and dissipations and debauches. Blasted lives and ruined souls, their name is the symbol of rankest immorality, their bodies the receptacle of all its vile accumulation. The atmosphere surrounding them breathes uncleanness. But my country people, the louts who could not show their faces in social life, are wholesome. Their skins may be browned by sun and exposure, their bodies twisted by hard labor, their faces distorted until the features scarcely remain in form, their hands may be bruised and scarred and crippled; but a soul is always visible behind the labor-dimmed eyes; it is so near the surface it is tangible almost; it is the inner self, whole and pure."

Kathleen paused suddenly; her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed. Delane was amazed at her powerful arraignment; he looked straight into her eyes. She stood even with him in height, shoulder to shoulder, head to head; she returned his gaze unflinchingly. For one minute neither spoke. Delane's thoughts framed in words would have run very similar to this: "Here is a little

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brat of a girl, still in her teens, unheeding my suggestions, ignoring my commands, venturing to do as she chooses, regardless of my desires, looking into matters, acquainting herself with affairs that I would desire to be kept secret, opening the hearts of the people, leading them as she wills without an effort. She's certain to rouse up a whole lot of trouble, the dynamite is there, and she is just the one to light the fuse. Worst of all, she don't go about anything haphazardly. All is planned out by a system; she studies out along logical lines. What a brain for a young one! And I can't check her cussed inquiries, and I can't well get rid of her. The people would revolt and I couldn't handle them at all. Damn it! I'm afraid of her."

"Uncle, why can't settlers come here?" Kathleen's voice this time was pleading. "There's plenty of room and everyone wants a home. Why can't they come?"

"The devil!" Delane gave his hat a vigorous jerk, his glasses fell from his nose. "The devil!" he repeated with more force and started toward the barn.

"I will find out," said Kathleen, and she also started toward the barn.

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CHAPTER XII.

THE LAND GRAB.

WITHIN the last fifteen years at least 150,000,000 acres of public lands in the United States have been stolen; perhaps the exact number might aggregate three or four times that amount if the entire truth were known. Dozens of cases might be easily cited where one man holds title to 10,000 and up to 1,000,000, acres of what was once government land. One uncommon instance exposes a mammoth fraud of 15,000,000 acres acquired skillfully by one man alone in a short lapse of time—fifteen years.

There are timber lands, rich wheat valleys, grazing country on the plains, together with productive lands in the mining districts, that have fallen in large quantities into the clutches of land thieves. They are really thieves and should be outlaws—but so respectable! Some sit in the upper house; others whose land grabs are not so significant find themselves only in the lower; but the influence of all is felt sharply in all political affairs, directly or indirectly. "It is easier to own a judge, than to be one," remarked one daring land pirate.

They struck it rich in the West, amassed fabulous fortunes, by purely legitimate (?) means in a very brief period of time. They impose this vapory argument upon intelligent people, stretching their hearers powers of perception vitally; they want everyone to see the point; they are marvelous men, endowed with extraordinary ability, capable of superhuman achievements. It is a lie! coal-black to its extremities. And everybody knows it. Sur-

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veyors, inspectors and agents of all classes, from the highest all down the line, are aware of the facts, and every detail. They are charged with oversight, but that's all moonshine. Everybody knows the land department has not employed a body of deaf, blind imbeciles to do its work, yet from the actions of many for many years, up to the present time, they have earned the brand.

Some of the employees are honest after a fashion; they don't accept a bribe or a share in the spoils, but they are accomplices none the less, having learned to shut their eyes at the supreme moment, or look the other way. So doing, they hold themselves aloof; they are innocent men, having taken no active part in the pilferings, but they hold their jobs, getting a bonus thrown in with each successful transaction. It is merely a gift of gratitude from their employers. The Interior Department has been conscious of this state of affairs for over twenty years. The Department of Justice is not ignorant. With Congress chiefly lies the fault; men deeply interested in the stupendous land graft have sat in both houses, controlling affairs to suit themselves; occasionally when exposure menaces some member he is noiselessly dispensed with; he may be indicted half-heartedly, but never convicted. And so matters rest, the graft continues, even increases, as the buccaneers realize they must put in good time, working over hours, a reform being inevitable.

Extensive as have been the thievings in the timber and mining districts, they are insignificant when brought in comparison with the stealing of the homestead land.

It is difficult to determine just when the homestead fraud originated. Many years back the range was free and open to everyone west of the Mississippi, near the Missouri and across it. Herds of cattle in those days of

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old drifted up to Canada in summer, back to Mexico in winter; these were the half wild Texas steers, belonging to the man or men who proved the best with the six-shooter. Cowboys in those times were outlaws and murderers; human life was no dearer to them than the steers they herded, and far less sacred than a favorite saddle-horse.

It was known nearly fifty years ago that there were pilferings, but no one heeded land thefts in those remote days. The supply was inexhaustible; no man would ever take up his residence in those God-forsaken, sun-blistered plains in the West; men might go and make a fortune there; then return to the East carrying the spoils of the prairies with them.

With the increase of immigrants, and their advent into these heretofore uninhabited tracts, cattle kings began to see things. They must acquire titles to the country they had been occupying unmolested for years. With the thought came the systematic development of the big ranch. This was about 1890, and later. To relate the diverse means, the trickeries, intrigues, plots and perjuries utilized by these bold pirates would be impossible. They worked recklessly, concealed under the homestead act, securing thousands, tens of thousands, even millions of acres of lands from the public domains.

Under the homestead act, every widow, man and unmarried woman who has reached majority is entitled by the laws of the United States to make application for a claim, of 160 acres of unpreempted land, providing such application has not been made by them at any previous time in any part of the United States.

The government makes certain requirements; a married man must inhabit the land with his family for five

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years; a single person must appear on the premises every six months, taking up temporary residence, before final proof; however, the residence must be occupied fourteen consecutive months. Improvements are required; a habitable house must be erected; cultivation of the soil and a garden are also demanded. Yet it is notorious that not one filing out of every ten made in the ranching regions was given in good faith. Many applicants never saw the lands allotted to them; as to cultivation and residence those points were never taken seriously. In most cases, the big ranchman was behind the whole affair.

All sorts and conditions of men are procured to make homestead filings within the boundaries of the cattle king's domain. The ranchmen pay all expenses, with a \$100 or \$200 thrown in, according to the demands made by the applicant, and the understanding that when the patents are issued by the government, transfer shall be made, the homesteader yielding up all claim to the territory granted him by the government. Yet Section 2290 of the Federal statutes provides: "Any person applying shall make affidavit before the register or receiver that . . . such application is made for his exclusive use and benefit and that his entry is made for the purpose of actual settlement and cultivation, and not either directly or indirectly for the use or benefit of any other person."

Ten thousand acres of land within the boundaries of Distant View had in the last twelve years been passed over to Delane for nominal sums and expenses. "I can't be annoyed with little garden spots and flax fields, I must own everything in sight." Thirty-five miles of wire fence, enclosing public lands available for settlement, shut out homesteaders from Distant View. Delane, ignoring the government law that all fences enclosing any

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national territory must be removed, permitted the obstructions to remain.

Kathleen learned these things little by little. One laborer who kept his eyes open, said to her:

"That's why folks don't settle here, Miss. You see Delane's a powerful feller in these here parts. He and Gillen and the rest of the bunch control things to suit themselves. We poor ones ain't got no pull, so we can't buck against them, you see. 'Twould make land lots more valuable if it was settled up close, some squatter on every quarter, like 'tis over on the Flat, but it can't be. Land there sells for \$30 to \$35 an acre, but here, Delane says it ain't worth the gettin'. But, by gosh, seems ter me he's mighty willin' ter take all he ken git his hands on, jest the same."

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CHAPTER XIII.

THE REAL FACTS.

It was 12 o'clock that night when Kathleen, on Black Dick, came slowly up the lane from the west pasture, and as slowly turned into the big corral opposite the house. The reins had been thrown carelessly up on the animal's heavy mane; the girl's hands were resting lightly on the horn of the saddle. She slid easily from her seat, slipped the bridle over her horse's head, and patted his moist nose gently as she laid her own fair head against his black glossy neck for a moment. Then quickly closing the opening to the corral she went noiselessly into the house.

Kathleen had been over on the Flat. A feeling of loneliness crept over her as she closed her bedroom door. Why was it that Distant View stood alone in its isolation? The conversation which had reached her in the afternoon appeared a most plausible explanation. Was there no remedy?

During the following fortnight the girl observed some, questioned much and listened more. By the end of these two weeks, Kathleen had stored away many facts in her mind which she felt assured would be of assistance in her future labors along this line.

For be it understood that Kathleen believed, if one-half the incidents which came to her ears could be chronicled as authentic, that the stealings of the public domain by land pirates was the most daring extensive outlawry perpetrated anywhere within the Union.

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Kathleen put it down that if Delane owned the agent in the land office at Wishek, and controlled things to his own advantage, that the same must be true of other agents throughout the broad West. If Delane dictated the appointment of men favorable to him, in the lesser government positions, could anyone entertain a doubt that his influence was wholly withdrawn in the cases of higher officials?

Suppose Delane deemed it profitable to "import a bunch of girls," as he expressed it, from the East, dumping them rather unconventionally into the nearest land office in the severest and most uncertain weather of a North Dakota winter, "because," as he explained, "entry must be made at once, as there is a movement on foot to transport bona fide settlers. This must be prevented at any cost!" If he did this, would not other men see gain in like enterprises?

Originally the total area of the public domain amounted to about one and one-half billion acres. To-day less than one-third that amount is open to entry. Yet, allowing 160 acres in a tract—this being the usual allotment in agricultural districts—this means almost 3,000,000 more homes on our Western plains. It means 15,000,000 more people fed and clothed and sufficiently educated. It means less congestion in our cities. It means less friction between labor and capital. It means active minds and hands and bodies. It means better, more wholesome living. It means more happiness, and happiness breeds integrity, which opens the dawn to the regeneration of a nation. Does this mean anything?

The Government, in its all powerful wisdom, set aside this enormous area of its public property for the people, not for the man—for actual settlement and domestic

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purposes, not for transitory habitation and fireless hearth-sides. What are the real facts? What do Government officials report and individual observations verify? Tersely, that for every ten patents issued, one new home appears. Yet the Government demands permanent residence. "There must be a nigger in the fence somewhere." The laws pertaining to the control of land grants are fundamentally above reproach, but in their enforcement there has been—and there still exists, such a degree of laxity that the men to whose sections these laws apply, have forgotten them entirely, and acquired what is known to them and throughout the West as a "land conscience." And a very elastic conscience it has proven to be, when a man will make affidavit that he grew strawberries on his homestead, where investigation proved that the spot designated as his patch was a snow bank one foot deep during the strawberry season! Again, another person will go out on the sunny side of a 10 x 12 foot cabin, dig a hole in the ground with a pointed stone, and drop in one or two onion sets and a potato; in the following fall, when time for proving up comes around, this same man will stand before the necessary Government official and swear that he cultivated the soil and grew a garden. He brings with him two witnesses, who by their presence sanction his perjury. The patents are issued and passed over to some corporation, often on the same day.

The cases cited are individual, but they are only feeble examples of what occurs through all the West, where Government lands are still open to settlement. What is said of the agricultural lands is none the less true of the desert regions, where the grant to one person is twice the amount allowed in farming districts, being 320 acres. The law covering these arid tracts requires reclamation

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and irrigation together with actual habitation. Yet, while scores of patents are issued each year to persons vouching that the law has been fulfilled to the letter, thousands and thousands of acres of lands are uncultivated, unwatered and unoccupied. These have passed from the public domain and are being held for speculation by big syndicates or often by wealthy individuals. Yet the administration set aside these vast areas of ground for her people, for homes, for future posterity!

The Government means to do right. It intends well. But it is handicapped. The House and Senate are too often involved. A man will not fight his own interests. It is negative to human nature.

When a United States Senator, a representative of the people, as happened in the affair of Mitchell of Oregon, is upheld by his State Legislature, by his associates in the United States Senate, and stamped by them as being an innocent being, a just representative of his State, while at the same time he is under indictment for connection with the enormous land fraud exposure in his home territory, and furthermore than it was proven beyond a doubt that this same John H. Mitchell, representing his State in the best interests of his people, was in the employ of the Southern Pacific at an annual salary of \$6,000, it looks as though the System, not the people, are heard in Washington. It looks as though the System owned the Legislature and the whole thing from alpha to omega, for corruption, stagnation, and rottenness.

As to the dissipation of the public lands in the grazing districts, too much cannot be said. It is calculated that there are more than 300,000,000 acres of public grazing lands in the United States. And to what advantage is this vast amount utilized? While the commercial value of

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this extensive area is still practically unknown, its worth is estimated to be enormous. It is national territory, hence should be turned to the country's profit, until such time as it is placed where the law demands, and parcelled out to her people.

But what is the true situation? Corporations and private individuals have built up mammoth fortunes on this territory. They are the big ranch men, the bigger cattle baron, the respected men of our Western States, and in the building they have weakened the wonderful resources of the nation's public domain, through overgrazing, and perhaps ruined millions of acres, almost beyond recall, while the remainder requires prompt and intelligent attention to stay its further deterioration.

And everybody knows it! No school child throughout the West is in ignorance of these conditions. Yet there is no improvement. The laws stand in the law books, but there is no enforcement. "The System reigns. Public opinion aroused would compel a speedy readjustment."

"Miss," said Big Jefferson from Oregon as he moved toward Kathleen, "We know how things are up our way. We dragged the offenders into court, and showed them up. But the System reigns." Then he turned upon his other listener savagely. "They're robbing you and me, and all future generations, while the country looks on smiling blandly. *Damn them!*"

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CHAPTER XIV.

"THE PEOPLE" IN AN AUTO.

"Chook, chook, chook!" Johnnie Gillen's new \$15,000 French machine was restrained with difficulty. The black sides were smooth and polished, the metal shone like silver. "Chook, chook, chook!" The big monster, released from the confines and restrictions of the city, panting indignantly, longed to speed over the prairie trail unhindered.

It was early morning, a little later than sunrise. Gillen and his party of two women and one man, Carpen, were out in the new automobile, indulging a novel experience—they had seen the sun rise.

"Chook, chook, chook!" The machine started eagerly, as a ship released from its moorings plunges into the water. Madness soon superseded eagerness, the giant dashing down inclines and up acclivities with a furiousness that even rural law deemed impertinence.

"How beautifully, gloriously delightful!" remarked one of the women, a society bud and social butterfly. "How really, sublimely, gorgeously perfect! Ideally lovely, wonderously enchanting, grandly bewildering!" The supply of superlatives and breath being nearly exhausted, she completed in a faint voice, "marvelously intoxicating!"

"Good morning." The huge gray sombrero was raised, and the heavy black hair lay in thick curls over the well-formed forehead. It was Christ, who had just come out of the divide, and was going through the draw that lay

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diagonally opposite, when he came upon Gillen, and offered him the foregoing salutation.

The cattle had been in bad shape for a few days back; the west division had strayed over three miles south of Arbeley's, the north section had got mixed up with John steads, and the steers that were grazing to the east had wandered away among the hills. They had been in a bad way, but Christ had succeeded in rounding them up; having been out all night, and was now returning to the ranch house for breakfast. He was riding High Tariff, a neat-limbed little animal, white, full-bodied, round-limbed, the hips sloped in perfect curve, while little dimples came and went prettily on the glossy rump with every motion. A splendid beast, harmless to the casual observer, but the short, quick step, the decisive planting of the feet on the ground, the inward and upward carriage of the short thick neck defined stubbornness to the student of horse character. By the eye alone, with the pinkish white that rolled defiantly or stared sullenly, the entire personality of the animal was revealed. It was a wicked organ.

The automobile came up. High Tariff plunged forward, snorting angrily; fifty feet away he halted abruptly, regarding the monster with visible terror. Uselessly Christ endeavored to urge his horse to pass the intrusion. He reared, while the women in Gillen's party laughed. It was genuine sport to see the country lubber's horse "act up," while he hung on.

"Chook, chook, chook!" The machine backed up, went on, backed up. The bell was ringing, puffing haughtily; it advanced nearer to the cowboy. With every revolution of the ponderous wheels, with each clang of the bell, High Tariff was becoming more excited. Mad

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With fright he pawed the air with his forefeet; exhausted, he reversed the action, and lunged from side to side.

"Chook, chook, chook!" A less expert rider would have been flung by the bucking beast, but Christ controlled him masterfully.

Suddenly it came to the boy that "The People"—this was the name Delane, Gillen and others of their combine had dubbed themselves in a playful moment—were having amusement, and that he and High Tariff were the whole performance. A bright flush penetrated the bronzed skin of his face; he bit his lips thoughtfully, displaying a row of small even white teeth.

"Bang! Bang!"

A ragged band of a cap was on Gillen's head, the knot that fastened Carpen's tie was unfastened. Christ put back his blue-fire in his belt, raised the gray sombrero once more, and smiled as he rode past the frightened occupants of the automobile.

"You must not feel so, Christ," said Kathleen with sympathy, when the boy, despondent and depressed by the morning's experience, told her about it. He had worked all day and the previous night; it was evening again. With Kathleen, he was standing near the opening of the cattle corral, the larger one, that lay south of the horse barns, east of the cattle sheds.

"You are too sensitive, Christ, taking things too much to heart. Can't I convince you that wealth is not everything? Character exceeds it greatly. You are a good boy, Christ. You are intelligent, though lacking opportunities, and capable of becoming something, of accomplishing something. Will you try?"

The hard lines of resentment vanished from around the lips, though the gray eyes were still sad, looking afar off

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into the distance, across the plains—beyond them, almost.

"Can I? I have tried so hard to do right. I have injured no one. But the world has only knocked me about when I thought it ought to appreciate my best efforts to do right in my own little way. I feel at times I will give up, content myself here, work along, save a little from year to year, go hungry when crops fail, get married, produce a helpless family, struggle to feed them, see them suffer while my heart bleeds for them, get old, broken down with hard labor—do as the hundreds of others are doing every day—grow feeble, die, be buried on the plains where the rich man's plow will root me up as soon as he finds the ground that I lie in is good soil. I am only a Russian, a cowboy. Why should I ask for anything more? Anything is good enough for me." The faraway look in the eyes deepened. "Then again, I want to get away. Far off out into the world, away from North Dakota, away from the plains, and the cattle, and the people; I want to see things, I want to know life. I want to live as others, be as others, do something. I want to get beyond these prairies, away beyond those hills"—and he waved his hand toward them, where a white moon was coming up in the east. "I want to go far over there where the moon is rising. Sometimes I think I am wrong; no one understands. I never told anyone until you came; they would laugh at me; but you won't laugh, will you, Miss Kathleen? You make me feel so happy. It does me so much good to talk with you. Is it wrong to want to get away or to be someone? I feel mad sometimes; there is something like a fire within me—here." Christ put his hand on his breast. "I think I will burn up, and that longing, longing is always there. I am not satisfied. Then if I should get out in the world, and do something"

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—he paused suddenly. “Would I be happy? I think at times I would not. I might miss the old life, the plains and the people. I would want to come back to die.”

In her room that night Kathleen burned the midnight candle, and wrote:

The ceaseless fire of shackled pride
Lay smoldering in a heart.
I saw the burning hidden glow
The wish to be, to have, to know,
And of Life form a part.

I wrenched aside the angry chains
By tyrant's hand devised;
I taught that heart to trust me,
And bade its spirit rise.
But as I scan the distant future
The thought will come to me—
Perhaps that heart would happier be
A slave instead of free.

Then she blew out the lamp and went to bed.

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CHAPTER XV.

THE STRIKE.

It was early in June, the first week, and the sun indicated that it was later than ten o'clock in the morning, and there were on view empty wagons, standing up near the wheat granary; one gang-plow with two walking plows were run up alongside the fense; three drills were idle in the plowed field; two miles away (over the first hill) thirty working horses stood in their stalls, pricking up their ears, listening or raising demure eyes. All was inactive; the men had struck.

The position held by Labor in the thinly settled districts of the Western states is barely conceivable. Barring the harvest season, which covers a period from a month to six or eight weeks, when Eastern help comes in temporarily, usurping Capital's power—the hands receive scarcely living wages. Ordinarily \$100 or a little more for a working year, from some time in April on into September, this allowance providing for a family of six, or more, frequently twice that number, for twelve long months, fifty-two tedious weeks, three hundred and sixty-five drawn-out days. It plays on one's credulity.

A working week extends from the morning of the first day of the week until the morning of the first day of the next week, a week later. There are no holidays, no Sundays. A working day is eighteen hours!

"Too short, too short, hours must be lengthened, there's nothing being accomplished. Eighteen hours a day is no work for a man. Make it twenty! Make it twenty!"

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Such was Delane's message to the foreman, when he had run out from the city for a day to see how things were operating. "I will be ruined, feeding thirty horses, giving men three meals a day and nothing being done. I can't stand it; I will be sunk."

With the delivery of Delane's message at breakfast that morning the revolution broke. Every hand to a man stubbornly refused to go to the field. It was like stirring up a hornet's nest; they had appeared harmless, but as the hours came their indignation and resentment increased, a continuation of this injustice was unendurable.

John, the best workman, was prime striker. He stood near the gate to the fence that ran up by the stock hospital, leaning one arm on a post. He kept raising his eyes sullenly to the south window in Delane's bedroom. The shades were down; he was still asleep, though it was eleven. Matti sat on the curbing of the spring-house, the red hat pulled over his eyes to screen away the sun. He puffed meditatively a short-stemmed, dirty and smoky old pipe. Big Willie walked from the house to the barn, from the barn to the granary, from there to the end of the cattle lane, then returning to the house. He would repeat his movements, meanwhile muttering incoherently to himself. Christ was in the hay-barn door. There was the old-time sad expression in his eyes, as he gazed away over the plains, where the sky met the earth. Max, the cattle dog, was at his feet, looking up into his face with trustful fidelity.

At twelve o'clock Delane came out onto the side porch. Seeing the men standing around idle he rushed through the gate at the front of the house, unhinging it, out into the drive that sloped down to the water tank. A vicious blasphemy hissed from his lips.

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It was one stroke too many; simultaneously the men surrounded him, twenty or more, no longer meek or humiliated by his lashing words. Their voices were mingled in a chorus of strong protestation. Delane flung back biting phillippics. No concessions being granted, the petitioners went mad. Pressing up close to Delane, they shook fists in his face, first one, then the other, then both. Abandoning their English, each called out in a loud voice to him in their native language. It was a frightful battle. The men on the outer part of the ring fought with those in front to get nearer; those within, struggled with their neighbors for the closest place. Pandemonium reigned, hisses, imprecations filled the air. Delane waved his arms above his head wildly; he endeavored to speak but his voice was drowned in the uproar. Closer, nearer surged the howling mob; a human wall penned Delane in on all sides. The shouts and cries grew louder and hoarser, Fifteen minutes had passed, but it was hours to the man in the center, whose face was white and rigid, while the small eyes were dilated.

On the outer edge of the ring was John. He had participated less vehemently in the outbreak than the others; suddenly he stooped, picked up a stone, smaller than an egg, larger than a nut and aimed at Delane's temple. He had the eye of a brute, the face of a devil. Driven to fury like a wounded animal at bay, he was a beast, mad, unaccountable.

"In the name of God, stop!"

Though the name of the Creator was unknown to a quarter of the men, others were familiar in a vague way, with the existence of a deity; some had not recalled Him in many years, not since leaving their home land; the remainder were fervent believers though not practical

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Christians. The cry brought a lull in the storm. The vociferous voices grew calm, twenty pairs of clenched hands fell limply to the sides of as many bodies; eyes that had blazed with the light of revenge, were dulled; tense features and muscles were relaxed. John concealed the smooth, round stone he had intended for Delane in his large palm; watching a chance when no one was observing, he let it fall noiselessly to the ground, in front of him. Putting his hands in his pockets he assumed an air of innocence.

"Thank you, boys," said Christ. "I can not believe you intended violence." His voice was clear and unagitated; all faces were riveted in his direction. The youngest—save one—among the corps of men on the place, he was becoming a power, gaining prestige day by day. He led older heads by calm, magnetic methods in times of peace; when crisis threatened he commanded with a force no one dared resist. One by one the men fell back and the ring was disbanded, each man leaving without saying anything to anyone or among themselves. Christ and Delane alone remained.

"Thank you, boy; you have saved my life." It was Delane, the Delane of thirty years ago, not Delane the millionaire, cattle king, but Jimmie, the fifty-cent-a-day cowboy on the plains of Iowa. "Thank you." He laid a soft white hand on the strong, brawny arm; he could feel the big muscles rising under the thin sleeve of the faded shirt. Fresh, young, innocent blood was running through the veins.

"You have saved my life."

"No! It was to save my countrymen from doing a bad deed. You deserved to be mobbed!"

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CHAPTER XVI.

FINANCE.

"I can't understand it. I don't comprehend things at all of late. I never before allowed any man to raise me, but after that strike in spite of myself I felt compelled to give them more. I added five dollars a month to every man's pay, from little cowhide Billy Schultz up to Broze the foreman. The deuce! I was afraid not to. There's been an upheaval in affairs since Kathleen came here. The hands are getting so bold. I won't endure it; they do not fear me as formerly. Kathleen's work! When I think of the intrusions made by settlers within the limits of my domain here, since that girl discovered conditions here, it becomes unbearable. I swear I won't be submissive, I will revolt! That damned infernal Pete Mueller has the best quarter section for miles around, and the largest spring in the country. Four thousand acres of my grazing lands have been taken up within the last four months. More of that girl's work! Damn it!

"Old man Sshaeffer is ruining my business, letting out money to his Russian friends at such an absurd low rate of interest; it will destroy me completely. The help too, I have observed, recently abandoned all hostilities. The spirit of animosity that existed previous to Kathleen's arrival is annihilated. They are working together, side by side, harmoniously. The whole body, twenty or more, are combined as one mighty unit—another result of Kathleen's influence.

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"It is utterly useless to try to deceive myself longer. I fear that girl, damned if I don't! She sways the common herd without an effort; her smallest wish they act upon joyfully; her voice works upon them as an electric force, charging every man of them with its powerful current. What will be the ultimate result of her influence?"

Delane had looked upon his niece's association with the foreigners at first with disapproval. They were not in her class; they were among the ranks. Later, her energetic labor in their behalf forced him into a state of trepidation, from which he was unable to extricate himself.

* * * * *

"Perhaps I will let you have the money; it isn't any very great amount. I think I can risk it if the security is sufficient. Your horse is mortgaged to Gillen, did you say, and your cow too? Hell, what have you left? Nothing as I can see."

"I have my crop—three good stacks of hay—they will be good for a leetle, and my leetle wagon too. I give you a mortgage on them they be good for about \$200. I only want \$61. The mortgage I owe to the bank in Kulm is \$50, the interest for one year is \$6, and then a \$5 bonus I guess, that makes it \$61. I thrash, then I sell the grain in a month or so after, then you can get the money. Can I have it? If I can't, I don't know what I will do. You won't tell me 'no', will you?" Nicoli's voice was pleading; it betrayed his total dependence. "Will you?" he repeated almost breathlessly.

Delane again displayed a side of his nature that had been revealed to Kathleen once; it had been in his dealings with the help; it had not been comprehensible to her before; it puzzled her still more a second time.

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She concluded there was something abnormally wrong, something not in keeping with the average man or with a man of even Delane's mystic calibre—an attribute not consistent with the natural.

The poor farmer was in distress, in debt, "head over heels," of delicate health, an invalid wife, helpless. Delane gazed on the sallow face, sunken eyes, shrivelled form, without a pang. He made Nicoli repeat his words; he rejoiced at the pleading. He glanced at the small hut, bony horse and worn machinery; he smiled: "Ask me for the money once more, and I will let you have it."

Nicoli threw his whole being into his final petition, the hands were outstretched in supplication. He was a picture of forlorn helplessness. Delane flourished vigorously under the submission. "Yes," he nodded. The man was dependent upon him entirely, so Delane was happy. "You may have just \$61, not one cent more, though. I will take a mortgage on the grain and hay and wagon, anything else if you have it clear."

"That's all I have."

"It's risky, too; you might get burned out before thrashing is done. The deuce! I don't know."

A silent stare faced Delane. Words clung to the base of Nicoli's throat. He had seen relief, perhaps it would be snatched away from him. Delane played longer with the tortured man. "I don't believe I would be sufficiently secure; I must be careful, you know. I would like to help you, Ed, but I can't."

The yellow face grew white; the clawlike hands clutched the shining wheels of Delane's carriage to steady the swaying body.

"Well, Ed," Delane spoke deliberately; he had goaded the man to the utmost, and he was satisfied,

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"seeing it's you I'll let you take it. Come over to-morrow morning. I will have the paper drawn up and you can sign it."

"Thank you, Mr. Delane, thank you. You will never know how much this is to me. How much interest?" the man gasped.

"If you took it for a year it would be 12 per cent., but as it's only for a few months I will have to ask 20 per cent. I don't care to let out on short time; it don't pay for the trouble."

"Will you ask a bonus, too?"

"Oh, yes, \$10 bonus. Gid-dap there, Billy and Nigger."

The five mile drive to the Ranch house was made in less than thirty minutes. No word was uttered. Delane was silent, and Kathleen, who rode with him, was silent.

It was five o'clock when they reached home. Kathleen went to her room, the one upstairs at the rear end of the narrow hall. It was square, the dimensions, 16 by 16 feet. Two large windows were in the south; they offered a view to the other buildings—barns, sheds, granaries and stock hospital. Another window was at the west; this looked out upon the garden to both west and north; there could also be seen the long, high and wide haystacks that lay near to the cattle lane which ran between the garden and these stacks.

Kathleen's room was pretty, practical as was the girl, yet a distinct touch of femininity was displayed in all its details. The white dainty muslin curtains were draped gracefully, and fastened with tastily knotted loops of white ribbon. The massive brass bed had a pretty lace covering over blue, a heavy dresser cloth was worked in shaded violets, the chairs and desk were polished oak.

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One picture, esteemed as rare, the well known St. George and the Dragon, hung opposite the bed; there were pictures of outdoor life too—hunting, fishing and golf scenes, one sketch by Kathleen, of Christ and High Tariff.

A large square trunk, concealed under a richly designed oriental cover, was in one corner. The one door opened at the north of the room, near the foot of the bed.

Kathleen drew the big rocker up very near one south window; she placed one hand on the sill, rested the other on the wide arm of the chair, meanwhile gazing absently on the large rose in the center of the velvet rug. Five minutes elapsed. Arising suddenly—all her movements were alert—she went across the floor over to the big trunk, raised the cover, unlocked it, taking out a small green purse. She knelt on the floor near the trunk while she counted the money. Two twenty dollar bills, one ten, one five, one paper dollar, two silver dollars, two fifty-cent pieces, two quarters, five dimes, fifteen nickles, twenty-two pennies, \$60.97—there were three cents lacking. She would not ask Delane for that small amount, and she must have it. She searched the three divisions in her purse, looked through her coat pockets; that was all the money she could find. Suddenly she exclaimed, "I have two postage stamps. I will sell them to Mayme for three cents; then I will have enough."

It was nearly 5:30; no one would notice her absence. She frequently took long walks; supper would not be ready before nine; she would be back home before that hour.

She sold Mayme the stamps, receiving three bright new pennies in exchange, and started for Nicoli's,

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reaching his place shortly after seven. Nicoli was milking. Kathleen went over to him. "I have brought you the money you needed, Mr. Nicoli."

"But Miss, you should not have come over here with it. It was so good of Delane to let me take it. Why did you come, Miss? Delane never did that before."

"No, Mr. Nicoli, Uncle did not send the money, it is not his, it is mine, and I want you to take it from me. I will not ask a mortgage, give me your note with 8 per cent. interest and no bonus. You may have the money as long as you choose."

"Oh, Miss, did I understand? You don't want no mortgage and no bonus? Is that what you said, Miss? Only 8 per cent.?"

"Yes," with a smile. "I trust you; you are an honest man. I pity you, and I want to help you. Here it is; take it."

Kathleen laid the paper money in the worn old hands, counted out the silver and copper coins carefully. "There it is, just \$61. It is all I had."

She put out her hand, naturally white, but now browned by outdoor life; took the farmer's grimy and misshapen hand within her own, held it in a firm clasp. "Good-night."

The man fell to the ground on his knees, covered his face with his hands and sobbed.

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CHAPTER XVII.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

"MAIL!" Delane tossed a huge bundle of papers, several letters and a telegram on the table at Kathleen's plate. It was Saturday evening. Delane was just returned from Lone, and they were at supper.

Kathleen took up the telegram quickly, tore it open and read.

Dear Kathleen:

Papa cannot live long. Come home.

Mamma.

In her anxiousness the girl spoke the words aloud.

"What's that?" said Delane.

"I am going home; papa is very sick."

"Ugh! It will be some time before you get out of here. The train don't leave to-morrow, Sunday, you know. You are stuck here until Monday afternoon."

The remainder of the meal was passed in silence, the men glanced furtively at Kathleen. She sipped her tea slowly; Delane ate most heartily. The following morning, Sunday, Kathleen was out of her room early. Her eyes were dull and heavy; she had spent a sleepless night weeping; at daybreak the reaction came, and she dried her eyes.

She was standing near a tall, slim cottonwood that grew near the side of a dugout, when Christ came in from milking. He touched his sombrero without speak-

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ing ; he doubtless was experiencing that constrained sensation we have all undergone at some period of our lives, when desiring to utter words of sympathy, but wanting language for expression.

He was regarding her from his position in the spring-house door, as she rested her slender body against the slender trunk of the tree, meanwhile plucking the leaves of the tree and tearing them up nervously.

Mrs. Blair called breakfast. Kathleen did not eat much, some toast and fresh milk—still warm from the cows, but it strengthened her. After the meal, being unable to remain in her room, she took a walk over to Coyote Rally, eight miles to the east, returning by Buffalo Stampede, a distance of twenty miles in all. It was four o'clock when she returned.

Coming up the south drive that passed through the cattle corral, Kathleen observed the hands all assembled near the machine shed ; from fifteen to twenty neighbors were with them. Delane was just leaving the house to join the others. There was Victor Anderson, Jakie Deutcher, Ole Rue, Matti Caugus, Johnnie Bergstrom, Pete Catling, all the Muellers, Langs and Schaeffers. Mayme sat on the top log of a five-foot fence, her yellow hair flying in long strands over her eyes, a blue ruffled sunbonnet was set on the back of her narrow head. "Oh, say, won't that be just fine, just grand! Oh, won't that be too jolly for anything. Isn't it the most comikilest affair you ever heard of? Funny, ain't it? Ma says so. Won't Kathleen be surprised when she gets back? How much have you got now, Christ? Say, if this isn't one of the best jokes I ever saw. It's the most comikilest thing that ever happened here, I bet. Ma says so." The girl's arms were akimbo, her long legs dangled to the second

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log from the bottom of the fence, her large flat feet with the No. 7 E E shoes touched the ground—almost.

"How much did you say you had now, Christ?"

"Twelve dollars and nineteen cents; Broze gave \$5, Big Willie \$1.50, Jerry 75 cents, Johnnie 50 cents, Dorr 85 cents, John \$1, Mrs. Blair 45 cents, Ole 65 cents, Victor Anderson 95 cents, Pete Mueller 35 cents and Little Willie 19 cents. How much can you give us, Mayme?"

"Well, I don't know exactly; you see I'm going to the ball week from Friday, there's lots of things I have to get. I'm going with Jimmie Murphy, and you all know what a swell guy he is, and I will have to fix up nice or I can't hold him. I've got to buy me a new dress like Kitty Night has, you know, that one she wore to the picnic over in Carlson's hills, the blue one with the big red roses, moss roses, I guess they was; then I'll have to have a silk girdle to wear with it; girdles are all the rage now. Did you know? But I can't afford shoes, because I must have another pair of stockings; two pair is hardly enough for a girl who goes out in society so much as I do. One ought to have three pair, then I would have lots of changes. It's better, don't you think so? Ma says so. I almost think I ought to have one more handkerchief, two is none too many and one is hardly enough sometimes. Do you think so?"

Christ had awaited patiently Mayme's reply. Not receiving it, he repeated his question. "How much can you spare, after buying all that finery?"

"Oh, yes, I was telling. I will let you know in just a minute. Just \$1.01; that will be all I will have left. That makes it \$13.20. Isn't it funny? And Kathleen will be so surprised. Say, but we will have fun at the next ball, a week from Friday. Of course any of you

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can't go, but I will tell you all about it. That will be something!"

"Christ, I want to give something for Kathleen, too"—Matti interrupted Mayme. "I ain't got pretty much, but I help a leetle, I been seeck pretty much this last month, so I couldn't work not a leetle, but I help some for the geerl, she been a neece leetle geerl, I leeke her pretty good. My eye be seeck, he been seeck two weeks, he pain so much, I think I go loose in my mind, I been so seeck. I geeve you only 23 cents for Kathleen, but it help a leetle." Matti counted the pennies out willingly. It took his last cent. He tied up the old tobacco pouch that served him for a pocketbook, and slipped it, empty, into his faded jeans. "I been so glad to give a leetle."

"I got it, Mr. Delane. I got it. Will you give me the two dollars you promised me?" Conrad Lung left the crowd, going over to Delane who was near the north gate.

"Got what?" Delane demanded, a trifle impatiently.

"That big badger you have wanted so long. Will you give me the \$2?" Delane had for a long time desired a badger for a pet,—simply a fancy—in keeping with his idiosyncrasies.

"Yes, here's your money." He gave the man a new crisp bill. Lung returned with it to Christ. "It was the only way; I had no money and I wanted to give something, when I struck on that plan. Have you enough now?"

"It is growing fast. Everyone is doing a little," Christ replied.

"Mr. Delane." The speaker's voice trembled, his eyes were wide open, hesitating, he gathered courage. "Mr. Delane, my mother he buys you one gobblers onct, for

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\$1; he buys you this one gobblers. You take him? one gobblers."

"Hell, I wanted that gobbler to eat last Thanksgiving Day, but seeing I have the turkey hens this year, I will have to get a fatter one some place, so I might as well keep this one. He is a good-looking bird."

"Thank you, my mother he said you wants one gobblers, so I took the biggest one I could find; he weighs werry near 30 pounds, I think. He was heavy. I carry him all the way, five miles." Jakie Deutchman set the big bronze turkey on the ground, straightened out his arms; they were stiffened from the heavy load, for he was only sixteen, and small for his age. "Thank you for the money." He grabbed the silver dollar from Delane's soft white hand, and ran with it to Christ—"There!"

"Schaeffer added \$1 to the pile, Pete Catling 32 cents—\$17.75 in all. Christ counted it carefully, then taking a roughly worn red purse from a pocket in his faded black shirt, he put \$2 more with it—\$19.75 total.

Christ dumped the money into his gray sombrero. "Thank you, boys, you have been very generous; every one has done all he was able—some even more, but I can tell you Kathleen will be grateful. I will thank you in her name. She is going home to-morrow afternoon. She had no money as she let Nicoli have it Friday night, and she would not ask Delane for any; but she has been kind to us; now we can show her we are thankful, by helping her when she is in need. When we were sick she nursed us, helping us with money if necessary, and yes, thank God, she has done that for us which no one else ever thought of before, she lifted us up when our hearts were breaking. Thank you, once more, boys."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

AT HOME.

THE following morning (Monday) Christ drove with Kathleen to Lone. The laggard train, due at 2.45, did not pull in until three hours later—5.45. He took her hand in a sympathetic clasp. "Good-bye, Kathleen, until we meet again."

Kathleen embarked. Her short gray covert skirt, tan travelling coat and the large gray sombrero with the four shining silver stars on the crown, offered a most noticeable contrast to the red and green and yellow dresses of the Russian passengers, with black shawls over their black hair.

She stood on the rear platform as the engine pulled out lazily. Christ watched the girlish figure as the coach disappeared behind a curve in the tracks; she was looking down the road at him until a hill concealed him from view. He sighed as he saw the smoke from the train vanishing in the clear air. She still gazed as the cloud of dust in the trail rolled away out of sight.

"Hankinson, Hankinson, next station's Hankinson!" The tall lanky brakesman sang out the words in a sing-song monotone, as he hurried awkwardly down the aisle, swinging his red lantern menacingly. Some of the passengers being disturbed, shifted into a more comfortable position, others snored uproariously, a pert canary on the seat opposite Kathleen opened its beady eyes, chirped three times sleepily, and put its head under its wing again. A middle-aged man in the front end of the car

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laid down a worn violin ; he had been playing plaintive old southern airs for over an hour. Dropping his head on the back of the seat before him, he soon slept.

The night wore on. Kathleen sat up erect. Rubbing her eyes, she looked out of the window. A mile or two to the north, across the prairies, could be seen the town, its lights shining out into the darkness. It was two o'clock now. At 2.20 the train steamed in disobediently ; being pushed to make up for three hours' lost time, it rebelled in its servitude. Puffing indignantly it slowed up reluctantly, then came to a dead stop.

A school teacher, about nineteen years old, two women with eight children between them, a good looking, rosy-cheeked girl of sixteen, one aged man, two young men and one stripling, green as grass, and Kathleen alighted.

They entered the dingy little station. Hard wooden benches ran around the small room on three sides ; on the one other lay the ticket clerk's office, a map of North Dakota on which was traced in vivid red the course of the "Soo Line," a small blackboard with a written bulletin of the outgoing and incoming trains. It read : "The train east leaves two hours after arrival. The train west leaves at regular time."

A smoky bracket lamp, with a fly-specked, dusty reflector, was fastened near the ticket office ; cobwebs hung in graceful drapes from the door to the two windows, banana peelings, peanut shucks, dead matches, were strewn over the floor. Two hours passed, and it was daylight when the little party again boarded the train.

The Cities were reached by 10.15 a. m., and at 8 p. m. the same evening, Kathleen purchased a ticket to Redwood, a little town in the East, that is in southern Wisconsin. One penny worn almost smooth—only the upper

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half of the Indian head and decorative feathers remained—reposed in the girl's green purse—all that was left of the help's donation. The fare from Lone, North Dakota, to Redwood, Wisconsin, was \$19.74.

As she sat in the crowded day car, preparing to undergo her second experience of an all night's sit up, her thoughts reverted to the cozy compartments ahead. She recalled the spacious sleeping car, the ample berth, the seclusiveness, the rich appointments she had always known when travelling—prior to this trip. These luxuries must be denied her now. The meager amount bestowed by the men on Delano's ranch had allowed neither sleepers nor viands. Christ had given her when going out from Lone, four oranges and some apples from his trunk; these had been her sole source of sustenance for almost two days and nights.

At 11 a. m., the fourth day of the week, Wednesday, Kathleen alighted at Redwood. No one met her; she took the first cab, the one closest to the pavement. By 11.15 she was at The Groves. Home once more! After almost a year's absence!

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CHAPTER XIX.

FROM THE ARMS OF DEATH.

"KATHLEEN!" The girl started, for the voice was familiar to her. She was going to her hotel; the West on Fifth and Hennepin, and at the moment was on Second Avenue, nearly opposite the Metropolitan Opera House. Anyone acquainted with the greater of the Twin Cities is not in ignorance of the long dark alley lying between the theatre and the narrow building facing Seventh Street. It is a passageway, leading up to the rear entrance of a popular cafe. Nominally endeavoring to be respectable, it has failed absolutely, being a common rendezvous for men with other men's wives, young girls and virtue sharks.

"Kathleen!" She glanced down the alleyway. Marshall Stewart with a companion, Jennie Kilbar, was a few steps distant from her. Instantaneously she recognized him, though his face was flushed with liquor, and the once clear eyes were dimmed and heavy. The voice was still mellow, but Kathleen detected a foreign ring; it was unmodulated; an uncontrolled empty laugh escaped his lips.

"Kathleen, have you forgotten?" He was very near her now. She raised her eyes to his—calm, reproachful, sorrowful, pitying eyes they were. She did not reply, but went on to her hotel.

It was 12 o'clock, midnight. Kathleen rolled from side to side of the spacious mahogany bed; her head tossed restlessly on the fine white though now rumped

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pillow coverings. In adjoining rooms and halls, departing and returning guests chatted gaily. Up and down the steep stairways, ceaselessly hurried the bell hoppers. The thick carpets grew hot under the constant pressure of their feet. Broken pieces of limpid ice clashed against the sides of stout white pitchers which were borne in steady hands. Through the transom over the door a rich red light slanted in, indicating the way to the fire escape. Through the window that opened out upon a wide court could be seen, on the seventh floor of the Masonic Temple, scores of happy dancers, whirling through an alluring waltz. The strains of languorous music reached Kathleen, and she turned her face toward the wall. The night was hot, it being late in June, but a refreshing zephyr sifted through the Brussels window draperies, falling in subdued waves on the girl's white face.

In her wakefulness she lived over again every detail of her father's sickness and death—his last embrace, his final words, the cold stillness, her mother's grief, her own sorrow, the funeral, and the cruel grave. She stifled a sob, clutching the bedclothes nervously. Momentarily in imagination she went back to the last previous time she had seen Marshall Stewart. They were among the foothills, near Arbeleys, in the big pasture. He had confessed his love, she had admired him. He had been the realization of her highest idealization then, but—now ; in less time than one year he had degenerated into a failure, almost, perhaps entirely, hopeless. Kathleen closed her eyes, aiming to blot out the remembrance.

One hour—two hours—passed. The hotel became still, the street below was still, the night was still. She went to sleep, as the clock struck two.

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The Mississippi—calm, eloquently majestic, also slept. A round, cream-colored moon, slipping horizontally toward the horizon, dipped ashy beams in the placid water. Countless myriads of stars blinked sleepily in the cloudless, turquoise sky. Small islands dotted the river at uncertain distances. Trees stood like silent sentinels in impressive lines along the water's edge. Vines clasped clinging tendrils about the sturdy trunks and branches of hardy maples or graceful elms. The breath of a lingering spring still pervaded the air. Thousands of smooth logs reposed in the river, driftwood was scattered over the water's surface. The aroma of wild flowers and tame clover permeated the atmosphere. One solitary owl disturbed the nocturnal peace with a dismal hoot.

In the distance the city's lights blazed resplendently from lewd playhouses and licentious cafes. Countless numbers were buried in sinful debaucheries and wanton pleasures, over there in the city. It seemed a blasphemy perpetrated against the virgin night. Out in the country—away, away—far from corrupted civilization, where the plains expand and chaste brooks babble over maiden rocks, all vegetation, every blade of grass is pure, and looks upon an innocent night. There too, under the canopy of a stainless sky, are country lubbers, fools, and hay-seeds, the butt of cruel jokes and stinging flings; but they are boys and men, the noblest handiwork from the Creator's workshop. They are true to their God, their country and their womankind. They would sooner sacrifice their lives or spill every drop of blood in their sun-burnt bodies than place one tiny drop of stain upon a woman's soul; furthermore they would flog the yelping city cur who did. Alone with virgin nature they are

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sleeping untroubled, while God's candles burn steadily in the firmament.

"My God! My God! Has it come to this?"

Marshall Stewart was standing by the edge of the river. He gazed down into the still waters of the Mississippi as dark shadows came and went over the glassy surface. His face was ashen, and his dark eyes shone like coals of light in their hollow sockets; his lips quivered and his hair had a shaggy appearance. His whole body trembled, he having lost control of his nerves; he clutched at a nearby tree for support, missed, slipped, but escaped the water. Regaining himself, he stepped back a few paces. He tore at the collar of his white silk shirt, heedlessly ripping off the buttons down the front. Some internal fire was consuming him and he was almost stifled for breath. A fresh night breeze fell upon his bare breast and throbbing temples; it soothed him, filling him with invigorated life. The senses that had been deadened by Bacchus were awakened, the stupor vanished, and he came again into control of his nerve-shattered mind and body. He breathed three times deeply.

Never since he had opened up his downward career, nearly a year previous, had Marshall Stewart experienced so keen a sensation of the enormity of his degradation. On leaving college at the age of twenty-one, he had anticipated so much, hoped for so much. Sooner or later he had deemed success inevitable; failure was to him an impossibility. He had enthusiastically undertaken the work among the people upon the Western plains. Then Kathleen had come.

Marshall recalled each word, each smile, each kindness that Kathleen Freeman had extended to him during their brief acquaintanceship.

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The sweet yet bitter remembrance unstrung him. He crept to the river and gazed with fixed eyes into its depth. There was an allurements in those waves. He crept closer, and enraptured by some indefinable force, advanced closer still. Hundreds, thousands, of charms impelled him nearer. He threw back his arms, his body lurched forward, only a fraction of an inch lay between him and the river. "God!" He clasped his hands over his head in instant realization; then turning suddenly he ran away through the trees, not stopping until he came to the carline where he took an owl car, returning to his hotel and Jennie Kilbar.

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CHAPTER XX.

A VENTURE.

BLACK DICK, Kathleen's horse, made over the ground like an arrow, covering the distance between the Home Ranch and the New Ranch in a surprisingly short lapse of time. After the first two miles had been passed, the clump of trees in the gulch by the ranch house were lost to view; only the nude prairies reached out in each direction.

Kathleen stood up in the stirrups. Looking many miles to the east she discovered a bunch of horses—they were the object of her search—grazing unmolested among the foothills near Larson's.

The girl shook the reins over her horse's head, and the animal sped forward, eagerly leaping ravines and high boulders. Her body swayed to and fro cowboy fashion in rhythmic harmony with the horse's motions. Her face was flushed under the recreation and her shining hair blew about her cheeks unconfined.

Kathleen had acquired the West easily, taking to the athletic outdoor life. She possessed innate freedom of thought and expression, and a determination which the East had held restrained. There was a breezy self-reliance in her makeup that seemed questionable to Northern girls, and unfathomable to a girl from the South, who would deem activity a needless expenditure of exertion. She toyed with the loose coils of rope, hanging from the horn of the saddle, and caressed lovingly the glistening six-shooter in her belt. She was woman through and

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through, yet a genuine girl of the plains. Looking away, miles and miles, where the sky bent down to the ground and the earth ran up to the heavens, a thrill of ecstasy swept over her. She was returned once more to her cherished haunts—to nature, to the plains, to her people.

Black Dick stopped almost suddenly, throwing up his ears. Kathleen listened; from the direction of Cactus Point came the sound of horse's hoofs. She waited, and ten minutes later Christ on High Tariff rode into view. He had been following a cattle path that wound about the base of a high hill. He raised his sombrero, displaying a mat of moist black curls, for he had been riding hard and the morning was hot. Then he reined High Tariff up into step with Kathleen's Black Dick.

The cowboy had not been aware of Kathleen's return to Distant View; having been in charge of the Thistle Ranch, near Wishek during the girl's absence home, and since her return a week previous.

She shook hands with him, and leaning over in her saddle, patted High Tariff's neck affectionately. Meanwhile the herder was gazing at her eagerly, hungrily, as a starving animal longs for some tempting morsel stowed away beyond his reach. Glancing away quickly, the calm gray eyes sought the distance, while the brown hands restively worked the buckles in the reins. She was too beautiful to be so near to him, a cowboy, a Russian. He was about to ride away alone, when Kathleen addressed him. They went on together, saddle to saddle, spur to spur.

"Christ!" She looked full into his eyes, and he colored through the thick coat of tan. "I have been planning many things since I have been away, for myself

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and the others here. I want your assistance. May I depend on you?"

"My word!" The mellow, earnest voice filled her with confidence.

"When my father died he left behind him some money, I do not yet know the amount exactly; affairs are not all settled, but I have with me \$10,000. I expect, perhaps, as much more when everything is completed."

Her companion stared amazement. Christ had never possessed more than \$25 at one time, in all his entire life, of twenty-two years. He had seen Gillen with \$50 once, and on another occasion Delane displayed a \$100 bill that he had had a peep of. Now this girl beside him was saying something about \$10,000—100 times \$100. He was unable to grasp its enormity.

"I am going to start a bank, if you will co-operate with me. When I recall Nicoli's helplessness and am in knowledge of others equally distressed, I am decided; no power could deter me. I will have the structure erected over there on my claim. It will then be nearly centrally located, between Dawson, Gackle and the new town. I will even hope for patronage from Kulm and Lone. Money among the people here is tight this season; before thrashing in the fall is done every penny will be expended. Uncle is counting on loaning out almost all in his bank at an increased rate—15 per cent., I believe, is the lowest; then up to 20 per cent., or perhaps more. My plan is to draw trade from Lone and Delane's bank by cutting rates. I desire to make expenses; I want nothing more. My brief experience in Uncle's bank will enable me to carry on the business, I think, successfully in the beginning. Afterward, if the work is too much for one, I will hire a competent man, one in sympathy

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All the long summer day until almost dark, Our Bank was crowded with people. Swede, Russian, German, Finn elbowed one with the other in mirthful good humor—coatless, in faded shirts turned in at the throat, exposing brown and hairy breasts, red handkerchiefs knotted about the necks, in sombreros, patched jeans and

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clumsy shoes, they surged back and forth through the narrow doorway, winking, nodding, nudging, gesticulating, they talked one to the other, all together in a wild babble. Kathleen smiled back at them through the wire screen. Her first day was a success.

At the close of the first week Our Bank had had a remarkable run of business, surpassing anything before known in that part of the country—in all North Dakota for that matter. Tom Marshall came down from Oakes; he represented the district in Washington. He did not need money, as he had more than he could make use of, and he was not interested in banking, but this phenomenal prodigy he had heard of was something worth seeing; it was as good for the price as a country town circus. He returned the following day, reporting it the most marvelous and daring undertaking he had ever witnessed. "A little slip of a girl bucking against the Delane millions. It is absurd; she won't hold up long. Delane will permit her to amuse herself for a time with the plaything, then swallow her bunk shed up, body and bones."

Meanwhile Kathleen was prosperous and Our Bank was booming.

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CHAPTER XXI.

WAKING UP.

ONE Saturday morning early in August—the third—the Delane special rushed into Lone from the coast. After leaving Butte, Montana, the engine had been given the right of way, regulars were sidetracked all along the line. Delane had run onto a good thing in the wool business out West, there among the mountains, and he was speeding East to Philadelphia to seal matters with Bradford, Smith & Co. for a mammoth contract. It meant many thousands of dollars to Delane, so time was precious. He decided, however, to stop some thirty minutes at Lone. They could make up the delay before reaching Hankinson, and he felt that he must stop to ascertain the workings of the new bank—that is, his new bank. A splendid \$20,000 brick building had superseded the plain frame structure that had previously been located on the site, the old building having been moved to the rear. Brand new clerks, some fresh from modern colleges, others rich in wisdom obtained through experience, appeared at the windows and behind the desks, all high-salaried, shrewd fellows, with an open eye to the Delane end of business.

The Farmers and Merchants Bank—such it was called—was the finest throughout North Dakota. Built of a good quality of brick, with ample interior, three large plate glass windows in the sides and front, marble floor, artistically molded mosaic ceiling and mahogany finish—

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ings, it was undoubtedly a pleasure to behold, and excellent from an architectural point of view.

It was ten o'clock when Delane came in. The cashier reclined on a brown leather couch in the corner between the safe and a north window, the assistant cashier, a sleek little dude, was surveying himself in one of the large bevelled glass mirrors, a third man, the bookkeeper, was nestling in a spacious spring chair reading the latest sporting news, a black-haired, black-eyed stenographer was taking the dust from a shining Remington, the office boy was rolling a cigarette while he puffed desperately at another held between teeth that were none too close together.

Delane gasped. Everything was spotlessly, immaculately clean, distressingly so, but there was no evidence of industry or business.

Delane had been in ignorance of Kathleen's venture in Our Bank. With a party of friends—Gillen among the number—he had been doing the coast and the Rockies for the past four weeks. The cashier briefly told him the situation, timidly making the admission that since Our Bank had begun operations no one had entered the doors except to draw out whatever money they had deposited therein. Bulwart, a big ranchman over in the vicinity of Jim town, had called out the day previous \$5,000; other smaller sums were also taken away. The Farmers and Merchants Bank was reputed to possess a capital of \$100,000. Of this Delane held a controlling interest, eighty per cent. The owner of twelve per cent. of the remainder had actually drawn out his personal deposit and placed it in Our Bank.

Delane grew white, then purple; he paced the floor, bellowed like a mad animal. Raising his arms above

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his head, he beat the air insanely with his clenched fists. He stamped on the tessellated marble, kicked viciously at the ornamental woodwork, forming deep dents in the polished surface; he stormed, he roared. The clerks huddled together like frightened sheep. After two hours he sank down into a chair overcome by sheer exhaustion. Becoming calm, he began to think rationally.

"Joe!" The office boy leaped from his corner in a manner similar to a Jack-in-the-box bobbing up; his feet were about four inches from the ground before he came down. "Go telegraph Simmons at Culbertson, Montana, to take care of the wool. Wire Bradford, Smith & Co., Philadelphia, that I can't come, and get rid of that infernal special train damned quick!"

Delane breathed more freely after the departure of "that grinning imp."

"Something must be done to drown out that loan shark from her hole on the prairie. Profits are no longer a consideration; spare nothing; run her out if it costs your lives! I will pay for it. Pay eight per cent. on deposits, loan out at six per cent. That will break her. We can stand it for a time until she is disposed of; then we will come up higher than ever. The devil! I'll get it back out of them one way or another, if they have to starve to pay. It will be a lesson to other adventuresses. The hussy! She won't stand up long under the pressure of the Delane millions. Lord! What a triumph! I've put up with her impudence too long all ready." Delane smiled fiendishly. If Kathleen should win out it would place a stigma on the Delane name that he felt could never be obliterated. That was impossible. How did a paltry \$10,000 compare with almost as many millions?

"Be busy now, every one of you; lose no time in cir-

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culating this offer. Get people from everywhere to come. I want the bank to be flooded before to-morrow night. Let them come and borrow money and deposit it here again if they like. They will make 2 per cent. by the deal. That's a wonderfully clever way to entrap the stupids. Go to work, quick! Fetch them in in by dozens and scores. If this don't succeed, hell's to pay!" Delane glared savagely at each clerk individually.

All employees of the Farmers and Merchants Bank labored most diligently the remainder of that day and the day following. At night they reported to Delane little advancement. They argued with him that it would require time and patience to convince the common herd of the feasibility of the offer; they were skeptical.

"Many would not hear us half way out," said the cashier. "They would only shrug their low-set shoulders, saying 'Our Bank bin eine gute bank, we all like das kleine madchen.'"

"Give us time; it is all we require," chirped in the assistant cashier, carefully smoothing his hair.

"Time? Hell! I will give you anything but time! If that girl hears of our plan, she will have all the foreign scrubs up in arms against us. We won't be able to handle the mob. She will control every man in the herd in spite of us. The devil; how things would come my way if I were only able to shift her to my way of thinking! She possesses an absolute monopoly of all these trash. I will make one more effort. If I could but get them to come in; but, damn it! they shy this side of the stret entirely. Make the rate on deposits ten per cent., and on loans four per cent! The devil! If that don't land them by to-morrow, I will be ruined. That bold brat ought to be lynched."

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It was night, but the clerks scurried out into the darkness, to continue operations. Delane sat in his \$20,000 bank and waited.

Three weeks later Our Bank owned a capital of over \$50,000. The splendid plate glass mahogany doors of the Farmers and Merchants Bank were bolted, the clerks dispersed, the safe empty. Delane had evacuated.

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Mayme could not subdue the impulse; it was too overpowering. She began singing in a voice—shrill, unmusical, unbearable, almost——

“‘And the lady by the river
Got a sliver in her liver
Did she shiver?
Well, I guess, yes.’”

Everybody applauded, the men a little uproariously, the women reluctantly, a trifle; they were jealous, just a wee bit, of Mayme's popularity.

The ice being broken, Jimmie Murphy entertained the assembly with a native song, transported from Ireland, the chorus, which he always accompanied with a clog, jig or other suitable step, ran thus: “I am taking boxing lessons from a professor up in town, and I'm training like the devil every day.” This, too, was received with distinct appreciation.

“Come on, now, strangers; it's your turn. Can you do something for us?” inquired Carroll, addressing Mad Stampede?

“Now, by gosh, friends, we ain't the fellers what's goin' ter shift our share o' the load onter somebody's else shoulders; we ain't got no education, nor we can't sing.” Stampede had thought Coyote could give them a song, but when he had heard Mayme and Murphy, he decided that Coyote's voice would be like the roar of a cannon. Not wanting to display any deficiency or ignorance before folks, he concluded it best to draw the lines about Coyote's accomplishments, confining him to little things only. “So I guess all we can do

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yer, pards, is ter let Coyote call out the passes in next quadrille. He's got a voice like thunder."

"Maybe, but it can be gentle as a kitten's too and der," whispered Kitty Night to a group of girls idled about her.

"Agreed. Break loose there, yellin' Coyote Jack."

Coyote sang the changes to the tune of "There'll a Hot Time," the verse tune, in a voice clear, perhaps uncommonly loud.

"Git yer partners ready fellers,
Skeer them out upon the plain.
Stand up straight thar Lariat William,
Larripin' Jimmie do the same.
Lasso Johnnie, be more stately;
Hold yer head like Coyote Jack.
Don't yer cuss at me, Blue Blazes,
Fer I'm sure ter pay yer back.

"S'lute yer ladies; now thar, sonnies!
Ladies, yer ter do the same.
What's a chawin' yer, Blue Blazes,
Don't git skeery, just be game!
Give yer right hand ter yer partners,
Alamari grand right and left;
Hustle up thar, Lasso Johnnie,
In the shuffle yer'll git left.

"Swing yer ladies! hang on to them
Like yer'd hold a lassoed steer,
Or a frisky buckin' broncho,
They'll enjoy it, don't yer fear!

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Bunch the heifers in the center,
Let the steers form a corral;
Now jest swing 'em back to places,
Every sonnie his own gal!

"Let the heifers shift their partners!
Promenade, then, do-so-do!
Let each feller swing his lady;
Whoop er up! Don't go it slow!
Hug yer honeys, jest a little;
If they flinch, do it some more.
Yer ken bet yer spurs, my sonnies,
That they've all ben thar before.

"Give yer right hand ter yer ladies;
That's it, boys, yer did that sleek!
Swing 'em hard and long thar, cusses,
Brand yer crescent on each cheek!
Hold yer blue-fires in yer right hand.
Bully boys! that ken't be beat!
Shake yer spurs, bunch up yer cattle,
'Scort yer heifers ter their seats."

The last pale star was vanished into the blue sky, the first flush of morning was breaking in the east, over the grain fields, the grazing lands, on the sheep herds and the cattle herds, when six cowboys sprang into six saddles, turning their bronchos' heads to the west and north, in the direction of Cyclone Ranch; across the Missouri, beyond Mandan, they galloped away. First laughing, then singing, their voices could be heard in the still little town of Lone long after their departure, long after they were lost to view behind the hills. They were

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returning to their cabin on the plains—happy; to pass another year or two years or three years, perhaps five, perhaps always; but the remembrance of their night's pleasure would never be forgotten; it would be with them through the long coming winter, through the summer when they sweated and blistered on the uninhabited prairies, through many succeeding summers and winters, forever.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEAD HEART.

It was early one morning in August, the 19th; it was Sunday morning too. Delane was at Distant View; Kathleen had come in from her claim to spend Sunday at the Ranch house; the help were just completing the chores. Since the strike Delane had given them every third Sunday, and this was their day.

The working horses that had been in the traces before the mower, hayrake or wagon, whichever it chanced to be, for the last twenty-one long days, were turned out on the prairies, galloping away across the plains, thirty or more of them. The echo of their hardened hoofs on the beaten trail rang out clearly first, then muffled, now gone all together. There could be heard only the ceaseless drip, drip, drip, of the water, from the spring under the spring-house into the large drinking tank, east of the building. Constantly, evenly, the little stream slid into its receptacle, the gentle flow causing scarcely a ripple on the mirrored surface. Travellers from Lone to Gackle or the New Town always slacked their thirst here, refreshing their horses too; saucy birds tilting themselves on the edge of the tank, dipped their shining beaks into the clear liquid; hunting dogs paused in their chase over the hills to lap their dust-covered tongues in the water, and to cool their dirt-coated throats.

Bobbie was drinking here this Sunday morning. Perhaps as he saw his face reflected in the water he may have realized that he was not the horse of twenty-five

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years before, but that would not trouble him, this summer. Broze had said he was too old an animal to work; he had been faithful almost thirty years and deserved a rest.

To be sure Bobbie was enjoying himself; he was unable to keep pace with the other horses, and gallop away with them in their recreations this summer morning, but age in all life, animal or vegetable, beast or human, can not, after passing the noontide of its existence, participate in youth's rapidity; it must fall behind, idling in the balmy atmosphere of rest. Bobbie was doing this, and he was happy. He paused in the act of drinking; raising his head slowly he allowed his eyes, once bright, now dimmed by age, to rest vacantly on the meadow-grass on the other side of the fence. The grass there was always green, and it was always a temptation to the old horse when he saw it from the drinking tank. His lower lip dropped a little, and the water dripped from the sides of his mouth; but he was contented. Broze gave him three meals of grain every day; regularly, he wandered over the prairies, nipping the freshest grass and sweetest flowers. As the man who has never known a sick day ages most rapidly, so the horse that has never been laid off a day because of inability to be in the field is the soonest played out when he gets old. Bobbie had failed fast the last few months; the top of his head behind his ears was white; the hair just above the rubbery part of his nose was also grey; his legs were firm when he walked, but not entirely supple. They were noticeably stiff in a trot.

"It's a comfort ter see a faithful old critter like Bobbie enjoying hisself. It's a real comfort, ain't it, Christ?" Broze continued talking, not rapidly but con-

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stantly. His voice was smooth, even soothing at times. "I've knowed that hoss ever sence he was a suckin', I has. Holy Gee, but that animal has seed hardship, he has, he never hed a rest in his life afore, but this last July I seed when I was a puttin' him ter the mower that he was all done up. I says ter myself, I did, 'Bobbie's goin' ter git a rest he is; he can't live long, and while I stays on Distant View, Bobbie's not even goin' ter set his foot ter work again,' and as sure as my name is Broze, I'm goin' ter keep my word. Giminy, Christ, ain't that hoss enjoyin' hisself? See him! Look at the contented look on his countenance! But, by gosh, Christ, by gosh, Christ, that thar hoss ain't long for this here world, he ain't. I never noticed it so much afore. See how weary he walks. By my soul, boy, we must take good care of him; he's really dying of old age. He ain't suffering none, he ain't. Look at him now, will yer?"

The two men, standing in the horse barn door, watched the old horse with interest. Bobbie saw and came towards them. Broze held a round pan of oats in his hand; the horse broke into a trot, the foreman went to meet him and Bobbie immediately put his cold nose into the dish, eating eagerly.

Suddenly, as though belched up from the depths of the earth, Delane was facing them—Broze, Christ, Bobbie.

All were silent for a moment. Bobbie pricked up his ears, while Delane changed color constantly with anger.

By hell! How many times have I told you not to feed the horses grain when they are not working? To-day is rest day, and I forbid you to feed them; I forbid you to feed them. Do you understand?"

Broze did not reply; he calmly stroked Bobbie's neck.

Delane rose into a passion. "I forbid you; I——"

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Broze raised his eyes. "Here, Christ, fill this dish ~~ain~~, will yer, please? Bobbie, old feller, yer hain't ad half enough, have yer."

"By the devil you will do as I command you! Won't you?" Delane shrieked, shaking his clenched fist in the foreman's face. "If I tell you to not feed that horse you won't! You will obey me, you will!"

"No!" replied Broze. His nature was one of those that once aroused could not be controlled. "If God sent an angel down from heaven with that message I would not obey him—if He came Himself I would tell Him to go to——"

"Broze," Christ had placed a restraining hand on that man's arm. He checked himself. "I can't help it, Christ. I can't help it. I will feed Bobbie well as long as he lives." Saying this he snapped his fingers in Delane's face. "If yer said all that ter me and more I wouldn't have a word ter answer, I wouldn't, but ter a poor old helpless unoffending critter like that; it almost breaks my heart, it does. I can't endure it, and I won't. Delane! remember the time he saved yer life from the fire! That's what broke him down first. Don't yer remember it, Delane? Remember the time he was all yer had in this world. Remember, when yer slept tergether in yer cabin that long winter twenty-five year ago; yer would a died then, frozen, if his young warm body against yer own had not held life in yer, his breath breathed heat inter yer veins. Do yer remember that time, Delane? Look at him now, will yer, alone, forlorn, forsaken. By God, man, if yer don't have no pity fer him now, yer either a stone or er dead man!"

Perhaps Delane had heard Broze's last words, perhaps he had not. At any rate the first thing the two men were

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conscious of was that Delane was between them, a rifle in his hands.

"It's loaded. Take it, and blow the infernal beast to hell," he said, offering the weapon to Christ.

"Never!" came the answer in a tone that sounded deep from the depths of his chest.

"Shoot, I tell you, or you'll not go to work when the sun comes up to-morrow morning."

"Never!"

"You have your mother to care for, she is sick too. You have not one cent coming to you. Shoot, or you will go hungry all day to-morrow and the next day, and many days to follow."

"No! Never!"

"Your mother will lie under a little hump of dirt before spring perhaps, my boy. Shoot, I tell you!" Delane made to force the gun into the cowboy's hands.

"God help me!" A lump was coming up in the boy's throat at the mention of his aged mother's probable death. "No, I would sooner turn the barrel against my own heart."

"Curse him! Shoot it, Broze."

Delane was turned to the foreman who was white to the lips. Bobbie was completing his meal.

"The intense folly of feeding grain to that there; it don't work, it's older than the hills, and so weak it can't haul its legs after it. Shoot, Broze!"

Serenely, raising himself to his entire height, a mellow light of sublimity overshadowed the bronzed face. Broze's hazel eyes, now green, now black, went over Delane calmly. It was a tragic moment. Delane was heated with fury.

"Shoot, coward!"

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The fling was passed by unheeded. Broze placed a tender hand on the man's arm. "See here, Delane, yer and me have knowed each other fer years, ever sence we were little shavers, almost ever sence we left our cradles we've been tergether. We've had our ups and downs, our joys and sorrows, but we've always trotted along next ter one another in the same trail. Yer have been a hard man, Delane"—the foreman's hand was caressing Delane's arm now—"yer have done lots er things yer ought not ter; yer may regret them some day, maybe yer will, and maybe yer won't; but Delane"—the speaker's voice had grown husky, his large hand was tightening its hold on the rich man's arm—"if yer kill that there hoss here ter day—Bobbie—yer'll never have another day's luck in this world!" The large cords in the large square hand stood out most perceptibly, the clutch had become a grip, a vise, it was as a band of iron, the strong fingers were sinking into the soft flesh of Delane's arm, bruising it, crushing it. "And if yer shoot that there Bobbie to-day, I swear yer would sell yer soul ter the devil if he gave the price." He flung away Delane's arm with violence, and walked into the house.

One moment later, a shot rang out on the air, shocking the quiet of the peaceful summer morning. The murderer hung up the rifle in its place in the granary, while Bobbie stumbled, reeled—fell.

Broze grew dizzy on hearing the report; he staggered to the spot where the horse lay. He raised Bobbie's head and closed his hands over it; then he caressed the faded mane, he patted the worn feet, smoothed the hair on the body, untangled the matted tail, it was as though he was preparing the animal for burial. One hour and two hours passed, as he sat dazed, being wholly

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unconscious of his movements. Realization suddenly came to him, however, he laughed hysterically, but only a moment ; then he laid his face, white as death, upon the horse's body, sobbing convulsively, unchecked like a punished child.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

HARVEST TIME.

It was the last week in August, save one, and it was universally admitted that the grain in the fields was matured and ready for harvest.

Every living man, from the talented musician who sways the populace by the magic of his genius, compelling pulses to beat in harmony with his own, and hearts to respond to the heart-throbs in his own bosom or the powerful orator, who by some compelling eloquence causes the audience to surge with him, up and down, backwards and forwards, following the leadership of his words; to the vender, who creeps cautiously to the rear doors, offering his wares timidly—all these experience at times an interior satisfaction, which comes to those who have aimed and succeeded.

A thrill charges the labor-surfeited anatomy of the Western farmer as he stands looking across the endless expanse of lands—acres, miles; miles, acres, slightly rising, gently falling, gliding into level stretches as smooth as a floor, that lie about him unobstructed as far as the compass points. Though some of the land is his property, some his neighbors, yet as an infant might fondle a brilliant-hued toy, his eyes devour eagerly the fields of undulating wheat and flax, standing in preparation for the harvest.

He feels that it is his, his very own! It belongs to his wife, his children, his family. It means life and nourishment to them through the coming winter, through another year. It has cost labor, long hours for himself and his

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loved ones too, from early in the morning until late at night. It has called for sacrifices, demanded many drains on mind and body. It has drawn tyrannically on every fibre and tissue; it has sucked away vitality relentlessly; but success has come. The wheat grains are full and plump and hard, the stalks totter under their heavy burden. It is his, for himself, his family. It is his!

The last week in August, save one, every reaper and binder and header in North Dakota was in the field. Five, ten and twenty-acre spots fell rapidly before the shining blades. The larger tracts, of three hundred up to five hundred acres, which, prior to being disturbed by the reaper, carried the appearance of an ocean of golden fluid, yielded more slowly, less noticeably to the efforts of the harvester.

The men were happy, hilarious almost in their gaiety; they sang going to their work in the morning; they returned to their dung houses at night whistling. They hummed snatches of songs, while they ate their noonday lunch in the field. The children, contracting the happiness of their parents, tittered merrily as they trotted about their work.

The crop was to yield even more than first anticipated; it was to be abundant, exceeding even their highest desires, an average yield of 25 bushels to the acre of wheat. Incredible as it may appear, some positively asserted they would have 40 bushels per acre. This meant almost fabulous wealth to these poor creatures.

Before the first round was made by the machine, almost sooner than the first bundle was dumped from its fork, the men were in imagination making disposition of the money represented in the yellow sheaves. Schaeffer had decided upon depositing the full amount he would receive

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in Our Bank; Lang was to send his boy to the Cities to have a crippled leg cured; Anderson counted on indulging in the luxury of a glass eye; Matti desired to lay by a little; he might be sick again "some time pretty much;" Door wanted one more cow; Mueller, that is, the old man Mueller, was intending to buy an organ; Henry Graf had already ordered a phonograph from a runner who visited Gackle every eight weeks; Zeigelhagel's eldest son was to take a course in the new business college, going up in Lone; Barbara Deutchman was to hire herself out for a hand in some store; Fritz Catling's training in the Lone college for a bank clerkship had become an absolute certainty; those that attended services in the little blue church on the Flat resolved to put aside their share towards the contributions for a bell to hang in the belfry, which had been empty since the construction of the building. Others who did not assist at devotions, there or elsewhere, offered to help along the good cause.

The farmers to a man were happy. God had been good to them, indeed, this present year, sparing their health, dispelling every evil, while heaping plenty upon them and their families. There existed no foolish jealousy or rivalry among these simple-hearted foreigners; while rejoicing in their own happiness, they joined in thanksgiving with their neighbors for the good fortune that was theirs.

Around and around the fields circled the binders; the hum of the machines was sweeter to these people than the music of the spheres. The men and boys whistled as they urged on the horses; the women and girls left behind gathering up the golden bundles in shocks, answered the love melodies of husbands or lovers in voices ringing with delight and happiness.

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CHAPTER XXV.

CHRIST AND KATHLEEN.

CHRIST's entrance into the employ of Our Bank after leaving Distant View was received with general acclamation by every one but Delane, and in that matter Delane could have no voice. Inexperienced as the cowboy was, under Kathleen's tuition he progressed rapidly; within a month he possessed a complete knowledge of all the ins and outs of the business. Early in October, when the girl left for the Cities, to be absent a fortnight, everything passed off admirably under his management.

The people liked him, not only his own, who had known him many years and watched him grow into manhood, but all with whom he came in contact. Strangers transacting business in Our Bank dubbed him the "Gentleman Cowboy." His unaffected courtesy, distributed equally among all classes, carried far. Even Gillen, who was Delane's right hand bower, and one of Our Bank's bitterest foes, had once made the admission that there was more to that boy Christ than would ever show up on the surface—there were depths within him which might never be sounded.

Before many weeks had elapsed Christ had become indispensable to the stockholders of Our Bank. He was able to converse fluently with most of the patrons in their native tongues. Germans, Russians, Swedes, all talked with him at length to their own satisfaction and his; the Finlander's bewildering gibberish was most difficult to master, but that too he succeeded with fairly well.

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In the beginning there was hard work on Christ's part, and sometimes he would be a trifle discouraged in his new field, but insistency on Kathleen's side with renewed determination on his, soon brought success.

The people, Kathleen and Christ, moved in perfect harmony; no friction grated, no unlooked-for bumps jarred; all worked smoothly as the parts of a machine freshly lubricated. Of course Kathleen had seen a good deal of Christ when he was working on Delane's Ranch. She had talked often with him, but their conversation there could be carried on only in snatches, after working hours. At that time the girl believed she understood the cowboy, that she was familiar with all his aims and desires in life. In this Kathleen was mistaken. It was only after they had worked side by side together in Our Bank, day after day, week following week, above the books, over the mail, through the papers, that she learned to comprehend him in full; to her alone he revealed the depths of his grand nature; she alone was capable of understanding, she alone would sympathize.

But—one secret was buried in the innermost portions of his heart—fully recognizable, unconfessed. At times, when they stood together behind the desk, he in the same black faded shirt, turned in at the neck, she in the white muslin dress, he felt she could not be in ignorance.

Her fluffy golden hair touched his cheek once; that was one day shortly after he entered the Bank. He remembered the time; it was on a Saturday morning, and they were working up the books together. Its soft unintentional caress on the bronzed face thrilled him, gave an absorbing joy; a fierce delight swept over him. He was certain she was aware of his secret then; she must understand. He had glanced at her in rapture,

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hoping to receive a response to his own elation. She was balancing up the books, undisturbed.

On another occasion—this was on a Saturday also—again they had been making up the books and her hand touched his. The sweetness of its contact overpowered him nearly; he was alive, a new energy was awakened within him, a flood of devotion mastered him, he found himself struggling in the submerging ocean of love.

He was confident she could not fail but fathom his situation; he knew he was betraying himself in every word and look. But when she raised her rare blue eyes to him, trustingly, innocently, he told himself over again that she had not understood. Perhaps she might never read his thoughts. He must smother them, kill them, cremate them.

In this resolve the cowboy intended to be firm; he believed it at first possible to annihilate his love for the young girl who had grown into his heart, day after day, completely enthralling him with her sweetness, innocence and sincerity. He boyishly imagined, after a few weeks, a few months at the longest, his affection would be something of the past; he would then have returned to his former self. He and Kathleen would be fellow workers only.

Instead, the end of each day discovered him drifting nearer the Scyllan monster, sucked deeper into its whirling malestrom. In this alluring joy he was happy; she, Kathleen, was with him, speaking to him, looking at him, near him, so very near; the present was glorious, but it could not continue always. This relationship must be severed sooner or later; he and the girl must drift apart, if nothing more could come of it.

He caught himself watching her hungrily, and lingering close to her when it was not called for. At such

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times he would look away, or move himself to a distance from her, only to be attracted to her side after a brief interval as though drawn by a magnet. Frequently he promised himself that he would leave Our Bank, leave the country, go far away, where he could never see or hear of her again. Then he realized that that was impossible—he could not tear himself away.

Concluding at length the futility of an endeavor to destroy his love—pure, passionless, possible only to one of his fine nature—he determined at all hazards to conceal it from the girl. She could not reciprocate, and it would only make her unhappy; he must suffer, but he must also suffer alone. Under this determination Christ grew fretful and restless.

"You are applying yourself too closely to business, Christ; you might take a rest. Times are a trifle slack now. I can manage nicely alone for a week or so; you have been working too hard," said Kathleen to the cowboy one day, when he had become unusually inattentive.

"Work has never been recorded to injure anyone, to my knowledge," he made reply, not looking toward the girl.

"But you do not look well either, Christ. Are you real sure you are well?"

"Oh yes, indeed, I am never otherwise." He laughed, not merrily, but with an effort. Its effect was that of a hollow echo.

The girl was studying his features; the fine face was thinner; he was pale also, but perhaps that might be accredited to the inside work in which he was engaged. She had observed at times that his color was heightened abnormally. What could be the cause? She quizzically interrogated herself. The far-away look in the gray thoughtful eyes had been constant of late; their gaze

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was reaching out away beyond their range of vision. What was the reason? Perhaps the boy was discontented in his captivity, perhaps he longed to be back upon the plains among the cattle; perhaps he was yearning for the life out in the world, outside of North Dakota, away beyond the prairies. He had told her of that desire once; perhaps he sickened for its fulfillment.

"You are not happy, Christ," Kathleen said suddenly to him one evening. She spoke with distinct confirmation, coming over to him, as he was standing idle near the door of the bank.

He changed color rapidly, laughing nervously. She was very near him, looking directly into his eyes; it was an innocent, unconscious way she possessed and practiced when deeply concerned. He was not at ease.

"You are not happy, Christ. You are not happy, I know you are not, and it is all my fault."

He started, glancing down at her in half pleasure, half disappointment. Perhaps she had understood finally, but the calm eyes and anxious voice convinced him that she had not. "Your fault? Why Kathleen, little girl, could not make anyone unhappy. She is too good and kind," he thought.

"It surely would never be my intention, but we sometimes hurt others unconsciously."

There was a distressing pause. Christ was running one hand through his thick curls; Kathleen beside him was in contemplation. She was thinking that perhaps she had aroused an uncontrollable fire of ambition within him, which could not be extinguished. Perhaps all he hoped to achieve in life was unattainable. She had awakened this flame, he was not accountable for its consuming existence. Only for her he might be happy, yet

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struggling along in the rut in which she had first discovered him, working among the people, with them in his own sphere. She had felt that he was above this, and through her he had been elevated. She had remodelled him, making him her own equal; but she had made a grave blunder, for he was discontented, fretted by his betterment.

"Tell me, Christ, am I responsible? I thought I was doing it all for your own advancement. I know you are not ungrateful, yet still I feel you wish I had left you in your own location. I am sure of that. It is not possible for me to make amends. You must strive to overcome your ambition. Don't let it destroy you."

Still the girl was in ignorance. Would he tell her? Could he tell her? Poor helpless little thing, she was criticising herself, censuring herself bitterly for an imagined wrong to him, when his own rashness alone was accountable.

"No, Kathleen"—his voice was soft and low with affection—"the happiest period of my life has been spent in your company, with you near me to encourage and advise; you have been every incentive for a higher, nobler, truer existence. You have always been and will always be, wherever I travel through the world, my guardian angel. May God bless you, Kathleen."

"Thank you, Christ; you are very kind; I misjudged you most cruelly. Forgive me, will you please?"

Her lips were now coquettishly petulant; he had never discovered her in this mood before. The temptation to confess his devotion came again. But it was so useless. He was still only a cowboy, ever a Russian.

"See the three suns setting over there behind the hills, Kathleen. It is time to return to mother." He laughed, but the sound was still a hollow echo.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

DEFEATED.

DELANE owned fifty elevators on the Soo, thirty-five up in the Bismarck locality, the remaining fifteen following the course of the track down Oakes way, on the N. P. Together with Gillen in partnership, he dictated the manipulation of sixty or more of these grain preservers. This ownership, excluding as it did all competition in that business for miles around, gave these men great prestige in the grain business, which, coupled with the pull they had with certain influential people on the railroads, afforded almost a complete monopoly to these men on wheat, grain and other farm produce in that section of the country.

Thrashing was all done, the yield over-running all estimates on every product, flax, wheat and speltzs turning out surprisingly well. It was a bumper crop; the Dakotas had never known its equal. The wheat was all No. 1, hard, capable of commanding a good figure from the purchaser. The market quoted the price to be 69, 70 and 73, or thereabouts. Delane and Gillen put their heads together and decided that they would not pay that amount. Why the necessity of so doing when they controlled all the elevators on both railroads for many miles? The herd was hard put to for money; it was powerless to sell elsewhere; they were the only buyers in that locality, and the railroads were backing them. They would have only to settle upon the most feasible plan and then operate.

The people were anxious to sell, having no buildings

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in which to store the grain. It lay in large heaped-up **piles** on the open prairies, hundreds and thousands of **bushels** glistening as miniature mountains of gold in the **autumn** sunlight. Money was tight. Some of the men **asked** Gillen concerning prices.

"I am not buying now," came his reply.

Others inquired of Delane with a similar result.

"I am not taking in grain at present."

The people were unable to grasp the full meaning of this action on the part of the moneyed men, whose elevators stood gaping and empty. One week, two weeks slipped by; the yellow grain was yet on the open plains unprotected. At the beginning of the third week there came the opportunity Delane and Gillen had been holding off for. A drizzling cold rain came upon the country, descending relentlessly upon the wheat and flax—exposed, naked, out on the western plains.

Suddenly the elevators came to the realization that their emptiness was not in keeping with the season; their owners likewise discovered that something was wanting, as they viewed the vacant capacity of the high structures, and saw the mist enfolding the lands to the east and west, and north and south, contemplating meanwhile on the wealth of the hundreds of farmers pitifully supplicating the merciless elements.

They needed grain now, wanted it badly too. Reports had been sent into the Cities of a failure, harvested crops were rotting on the Western plains. Railroad facilities were insufficient to transport the immense yield; the products still lying on the prairies might prove to be an entire loss; the supply would fall off many hundreds of thousands of bushels. Conditions reached further East; prices went up, and the time was ripe. The Delane-

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Gillen combination must buy up immediately, and ship at once before the real knowledge of the enormous exaggeration reached East. They were on the ground, and capable of seeing affairs in their true light.

Two divisions were formed. Gillen with his marauders sought the country up Bismarck way, Delane and his emissaries scouted the lands between the Soo and the N. P., taking in Lone, Gackle, Streeter, Dawson, Napoleon and Wishek, with the strip stretching towards Oakes. They had men enough out to cover the required field in one day; each individual had rigid instructions from headquarters on what basis to buy, what sum to pay and to exceed that price in no single case under any manner of provocation.

Delane in person took in the vicinity about Distant View, considering himself the most fitting man among his corps to attend to Kathleen's locality, and deal with her antagonism.

He drove into Schaeffer's, yard after five in the morning. He had picked this man out as his earliest victim; he was the patriarch of the herd; the remainder of the bunch always followed his footpath. He being won to Delane the other scrubs would surrender easily.

The old man was milking. Two large black dogs bounded out from the stable as Delane drove up, the shining white teeth displayed from the open red mouths breathed rebellion. As the team made a long circuit about the buildings, moving in and out with difficulty, among the close-set dung structures, the eye of the man in the vehicle fell upon a long range of grain piles, lying in successive heaps to the north of the cow barn, out in a large uncultivated field. Beyond was a stubble flat; in the dim morning light Delane's trained sight revealed conditions

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most propitious. Though the grain on the top of the piles, which had faced the rains of two days and two nights were discolored and molding, as Delane drew out his whip, the butt of which had been stuck into the heap nearest him, the kernels rushing in from the sides to fill up the vacuum were dry yellow, plump, untainted—still No. 1 hard. The man in the buggy smiled.

"Hello Schaeffer! Hello there old man!"

Schaeffer's colossal form appeared in the low-set door; his head touched its top, though his body was stooped down some inches.

"Good morning, Mr. Delane." The old man made a fierce endeavor to display his innate good humor, but Delane penetrated the mask, detecting the man's almost total dejection.

"Well, how's grain, old fellow." Delane tapped the ground with the top of his long whip. Billy and Nigger started with spirit at each stroke on the sod.

"Bad, Mr. Delane, I am afraid, quite bad."

"Bad! Whew! Worse than that, it's in an awful way. It's rotting. Can't you see that, my man? It's rotting right here under your very nose, before your own eyes. What are you going to do about it?"

"Do?" the old man shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing."

"Why don't you sell it?"

"Nobody buys."

"That's true; no one would want to get that mess on his hands. He might be able to get off part of it on some one, but as you say, there's nobody buying."

"You don't buy it, Mr. Delane?" The old man said plaintively. He had lost control of his feelings in his misery. "I don't care for myself, Mr. Delane. I can

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stand it. I have 3,000 bushels here in my barn safe, **B**ut I didn't have room enough for all. There are 7,000 bushels there," and Schaeffer pointed with a labor-cr~~ip~~pled hand at the heaps of grain in the field. "I can stand it; I am rich, I have lands and money; but I am the ~~only~~ man who can. There are Dorr and Lux, and Lungs ~~and~~ Schultz, and Ginger and Bergstrom; you know them ~~a~~ll, Mr. Delane, as well as me. They have big families ~~and~~ are poor, actually have no money. I don't care for ~~my~~self at all—but them. Why don't you buy theirs, Mr. Delane? I can let mine rot, but if you would only buy theirs, Mr. Delane."

Well, see here, Schaeffer. You know yourself the condition of this wheat, soaked with rain, all black and moldering." Delane had taken up a handful, and was showing it to the old man. "Look at it. You're long on bad wheat, my old fellow, but such things must be." Delane was chuckling inwardly.

"Yes, it is the will of God." The men were silent. "But, Mr. Delane, that below is good; look at that, it is not spoiled; surely someone would want it; see?"

"Ugh, you don't understand things; you can't see them in their right light. No one in the big city who buys grain there would pay much for this, you know, it would not bring more than half price."

"How much would that be, Mr. Delane?"

"Well, about forty cents maybe; but then a man could allow only half measure—there would be so much waste."

"Would you take it that way, Mr. Delane?"—the old man's voice was loud with anxiousness.

"Well, yes, Schaeffer; I believe I would."

"And would you buy Lux's and Lung's and Dorr's, and—?"

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"Yes, I will take it all at the same rate. But you must get it over to Gackle or down to Lone by to-morrow or next day. I will ship soon. How is it, old man, forty cents a bushel for a rotten crop? More than you ever expected, isn't it?" Delane tapped Schaeffer on the shoulder mirthfully, though the touch went against his grain most harshly. Through his association with Gillen he had imbibed a particle of Gillen's gleefulness and patronizing qualities. Schaeffer winced, as a dumb animal instinctively shrinks from an insincere hand. It was as though the touch revealed Delane's duplicity.

"No, Mr. Delane; you can't buy my wheat nor any of the others about here."

"But Schaeffer, a bargain is a bargain. You don't mean that you will lose everything rather than take a good figure from me. Listen to reason, man. I can persuade you. Listen!"

"No, I won't listen to reason nor you can't persuade me, nor you won't get my wheat nor any of my neighbors', if I can help it. That's my answer."

The man re-entered the barn. Delane was puzzled; he waited five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, hoping and expecting the man to return. He did not, and Delane drove away, while the big black dogs snarled hatefully, biting and snapping at the departing wheels.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BEGINNING.

NOT more than three fortnights had passed since the Russian maidens in the harvest fields had mingled their gleeful voices with those of the loving swains, whose rich notes had fallen in a rippling cadence to the hum of the machines pressing glistening blades against the shining stalks of grain. Six weeks of anticipation, six weeks of unalloyed happiness—now the last week in October but one, discovers these once mirthful foreigners hushed into a quiet, defying the agonizing silence of the grave.

The Russian race is a race of heroes—possessed not of the heroism of those infatuated with revenge for the resentment of a real or fancied injustice, not with the courage that obstinately refuses to pale before the relentless charge of bullets, the fury of whose report is enchantment to often the most cringing coward; but the bravery which actuates these people is a steady flickerless resignation to the laws of God, and of man, and of nature, a yielding to these un murmuringly, day after day, month after month, year after year, the son succeeding the father, the daughter following the mother on the merciless treadmill of a manacled existence.

Externally calloused to disappointments, innured to hardship, the internal agitation is more intense, aggravated by the narrowness of its confines. These people had bowed submissively before the Jevastation of fire, humbly accepted famine occasioned by drought, yielded

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meekly to the destructive results of the rust, and now a new unheard-of scourge had been cast upon them. Weakened by over labor, strained by anxiety, the men and their women surrender themselves uncomplainingly to fate, as they stand side by side, hand in hand, viewing the product of their long toil, the heaps of grain before them. It cannot be sold; it is rotting kernel by kernel.

"I will do what I can for you," said Kathleen to Mr. Schaeffer. "Since I heard of Uncle's offer I have been aiming to work out some plan by which I might relieve the people and save their harvest. I talked the affair over with Christ, as soon as the news came to me. We have decided upon a possible way out of the difficulty. But we must all hold together. My idea is to transport our harvest at our own risk. If Delane will not buy, neither will Gillen, nor Benson, nor Wilson; they are all of the same combine. All fighting every effort on the part of the people to relieve their condition. I will telegraph to-night to the Cities for cars to convey our 300,000 bushels of wheat to market. I will draw out my own account in Our Bank to meet all expenses, waiting on the farmers till returns come in. It will be your duty, Mr. Schaeffer, to inform the people of my plans, telling them to have the harvest on hand for loading day after tomorrow, Wednesday, without fail.

At 9 o'clock a wire came for Kathleen stating that the cars would be at Streeter, Wednesday morning.

It was 10 o'clock nearly, on the forenoon of the day appointed, when the first wagon, bulging with its burden of plump, No. 1, N. D. wheat, came from behind the corner of Billy Jensen's cabin at the west end of town. This was followed by scores of others, from the four points of the compass. The drivers were mirthful and

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friendly, nodding to those whom they knew and those whom they did not know, with equal familiarity.

At 12 o'clock word came that the cars would not arrive. That was all. By 1 the town which an hour sooner had been busy as a bee-hive, was empty. The teams were once more taking their way over the uneven trail back to their farms, bearing the year's yield of harvested wheat, to dump it again upon the stubble plains, to bleach in the sun or blacken in the damp fog.

The next morning a meeting was called; Kathleen promised her people money to meet their immediate obligations; she assured them shelter for their harvest until such time as they could dispose of it to advantage. She urged upon them the necessity of their combined support in the movement she proposed to set on foot. A movement enabling the grower to control the price of his own produce, instead of dumping to an elevator at any available figure, as had been done in the past. Then and there was formed the nucleus of the North Dakota Grain Association, which has extended the length and breadth of the State; also to South Dakota, Minnesota and Oklahoma, but North Dakota always leading.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

MIXING IN POLITICS.

THE fame of the dilemma that the homesteaders of Logan and Stutsman Counties were thrown into, spread like wildfire. The bankers and elevator men looked upon the affair as a venture. Delane, more familiar with Kathleen's tireless pugnacity, regarded the matter with no small degree of perturbation. The last of the week a meeting was called up state. All the leading men interested in the advance movement were present. Feeling was intense, enthusiasm high. Neilson, a man of marked brains and ability, was elected chairman.

He spoke of Kathleen with gratitude, saying: "Every head of a family in the State, and every member of that man's family owes a debt to this girl which may never be canceled. She has fought vigorously, patiently, determinedly against most gigantic opposition. Silently, too, until Our Bank drew all eyes upon her." His tribute was ardent, and was sincerely received by all. "But the purpose of this conclave," he said in part, "is to bring to light every ill that we desired remedied, to discover the means by which cures may be effected. I stand here before you, a man whose every heart throb beats in sympathy with the downtrodden, the oppressed. I stand here, a man whose home is among you, and one who holds the same interests with you. I stand here, a man who is determined to do his share to force relief from moneyed and honeyed despotism, to all of you, and I will do it, though I may be compelled to turn back the wheel of

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fate with my naked hands!"

The man's voice was deep and penetrating ; his audience was about to applaud, but he stayed them, going on with his discourse, eagerly.

"To enter into detail here and now would be impossible. I will talk to you of what seems to me to be the primal difficulty and the one most easily remedied, and from which greatest alleviation is obtainable, if we all stand together, viz: the bank.

"Any man of intelligence, and you are all intelligent men, knows that the farmer is the victim of discrimination at the hands of country bankers. One of the principles of this Society which we hope to establish will be not to interfere with established institutions, provided they do not stand in the way of the farmer's organization movement. We also will not go into competition with existing institutions, provided they render the farmer needed assistance. But banks often are not disposed to act in a friendly manner. To control his crops the farmer must have money, but in many sections our people receive anything but a cordial welcome from their local bankers. Delane is but a type of many.

"'Money tight,' 'can't do it,' 'risk too great,' such are often the excuses. Sometimes there are even flat refusals ; and this is more aggravating because the money of well-to-do farmers usually make up the chief deposits in these country banks—hold them up, as it were—if the truth were known.

"I believe there is enough of farmer's money on deposit in banks, and not drawing interest, to finance all the crops of the poor farmers. It would be of inestimable benefit if these two classes would get together ; the rich farmer would realize a good rate of interest from

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his money, while the poorer producer would be supplied with funds to carry on his business. Both would then be mutually aided. Farmers are the chief producers of wealth, and require only to hold matters in their own hands to be financially independent. Why does this condition exist? Because farmers themselves permit them to exist. Farmers primarily are not business men, they have always been content to allow other men to handle the business end of their affairs. The farmer should have discovered sooner whither he was drifting. But it is not too late. Our Bank has shown to you what is possible to be done. This is only the beginning; much more must be accomplished.

"We propose to organize a central financial institution, headed by men of integrity, in whom all have confidence, secure then a practical banker, make it a farmer's bank, and have the farmer make his deposits there.

"There could be established sub-agencies all over the country. We would then be independent of local banks, and in time, though the step may seem radical, we will construct our own elevators, control our own crops with our own hands, and own our own money.

"This movement is just hatched; nurture it, give it substantial sustenance, and perhaps when election comes in November, if this creature just out of its shell is sufficiently developed, we may be able to send a man of our own to Bismarck, displacing some weakling now dancing obediently to the music of Delane's and Gillen's dollars. Perhaps we might even have a man in Washington!"

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CHAPTER XXIX.

BUT ONE OF MANY.

"Wie ist das Kind?"

"Es ist gestorben."

It was a raw bleak afternoon along in October, about the middle of the month. It was as though a day had slipped from its place on the calendar in the final part of November, thrusting itself uninvited prematurely among the hazy and balmy hours of autumn. A cold, drizzling rain had been coming down until nearly noon, then a brisk wind arose from the west, shifted to the north-east about three o'clock, and at four a damp penetrating fog was settling over the country.

There is a romance in the plains, a poetry in the prairies, with their jewelled grasses, flower-sprinkled meadows and sturdy herds; with their undulating grain-fields, wild song-birds and untamed nature. There comes a bewildering unconsciousness when the blizzard envelops its victim. There is something awful, yet spell-binding, in the approach of the red-mouthed, singed-tongued, blister-lipped fire monster. But looking out upon a bare expanse of lands, with their shrivelled vegetation, shivering flocks, wild shrieks, discontented birds, shrill, cawking, disconsolate flocks of cranes, gray, withering stubble fields of moldering straw stacks, smothered in a clinging, clammy vapor, the scene appears the most absolute waste of desolation conceivable, the blackest basin of devastation capable of one's keenest imagination.

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Kathleen was a fast rider, but to-day Black Dick made poor progress. He slipped on the oily soil in the trail, and if she turned him out of the trail upon the range it was to find travelling there was not improved, his feet becoming tangled in the wet matted wiry grass. Kathleen shivered with cold, for the cutting damp wind was forcing passages through her slicker as though it had been tissue paper. Five miles from home, she paused at the door of a small dung hut, the woman—Lux's woman—"her man" worked for Delane—was standing outside. The customary shawl was over the black hair, though a thin calico dress was her only covering. Large drops of perspiration beaded her forehead, as the biting wind swept about her plump figure.

"The child is dead?" queried Kathleen with surprise and pity.

"Yes," was the answer in a struggling monosyllable.

The woman remained standing stoically, no agitation being displayed except by the tighter pressure of the pale lips, the rising and falling of the full bosom under the thin dress. Kathleen offered words of sympathy, which the woman apparently did not hear. The girl was disturbed; she did not know by what method to reach the heart of this unapproachable sufferer. Perhaps it might be better to leave her to herself. She would make an effort, however, to comfort her.

"When did the little one die?" asked Kathleen.

"Last night, at 2 o'clock. I was alone, too."

"Alone?"

"Yes, all alone—my man he was not with me; he was away by Delane's."

"Poor woman," murmured the girl under her breath. Poor young mother, to be compelled to lose the first child.

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If it were the third, or fifth, or seventh, if there were only another left, the affliction could not strike as acutely, or if it had died soon after birth, a few hours or one day, the anguish would be less stinging. For now the mother had become accustomed to the new young breath mingling the same air with her, to the small warm body upon her breast, to the pressure of wet lips upon her bosom—all, everything was gone, the embracing arms were empty, the aching breast lay uncaressed. It was the counterpart of the wail of a perished soul, the scream of a parent bird over a vacant nest, the roar of a childless beast in the jungle, that came from the woman, half sigh, half moan. Kathleen tried again:

"I would like to see the little one, if I may?"

In answer the woman opened the one door leading into her dung home; Kathleen followed. There were two small rooms, the kitchen and a bedroom; their size was nearly equal—perhaps the bedroom was a trifle the larger. The floors were of clay and the dung walls, a foot to eighteen inches in thickness, were smooth and coated with a pale whitewash. The first room or kitchen, contained a stove, one wooden bench of such dimensions as would seat two with convenience; one large high home-constructed table and that was all. The second room was superior to the first in that it boasted a low-set twelve-inch window; the furnishings here were more elaborate, a large stout bed reaching up from the floor four and a half feet at the very lowest estimate. One trunk, that had travelled from their native land, one table that Lux had purchased in Lone, covered with a fine crocheted piece made by his woman, when she was in Russia. The entire place was spotless.

Upon a low box at the foot of the bed, on a soft feather pillow, near the door leading down into the kitchen, lay

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the dead child. The mother went over to the spot noiselessly, and raised the white cloth that concealed it.

“Mein Kind! Mein Kind! Armes Kind! Liebes Kind! Du bist immer——”

She took the baby in her arms, embracing the still little body hungrily, kissing it passionately. Suddenly becoming conscious and seemingly ashamed of her delirium, she placed the infant upon the pillow again, arranged the white cloth about the body carefully, then silently motioned Kathleen nearer. Though the girl was not yet grown accustomed to the darkness of the room, the one window affording little light, as she looked upon the small form in the snowy dress, trimmed with the lace which had been his mother's at her confirmation also on her marriage day, a little more than one year past. Kathleen shrank back almost in terror; the child's face, not more than half the size of the girl's small hand, was knotted into a wrinkled mass of distortion; there were heavy lines about the nose and mouth, the lips were plaintively distressed, the entire morsel before her eyes was dwarfed and shrivelled in figure and face, as a man of four-score or more. The sight was pathetic.

“Poor little thing!” said Kathleen, “did he suffer much.”

“No, none. He just fell asleep on my arm. Last night at 12 o'clock he woke up, but he did not cry; only had a little milk, then he went to sleep again. I did not sleep though; I lay holding him so on my breast.” The woman illustrated her words to Kathleen. “One hour I was still awake; at 2 o'clock his lips were breathing warm against my cheek; then there was a shudder, he was cold and dead.” The woman had told her story in German, which Kathleen understood fairly well, but her narra-

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tive was broken frequently by appealing sighs and smothered chokings.

"He did not suffer," Kathleen repeated to herself doubtfully. What then must be the solution, the mystery of that tired, worn out, puckered up little face on the hot pillow? Intuition, which at times springs to the aid of the most untutored, thrust itself upon Kathleen at that moment. In this parcel of humanity was divulged all the pathos of its generation; the labor, the fatigue, the exhaustion of the toil-burdened mother, the sympathy and helpless suffering of the father. Day after day, week succeeding week, month chasing month, was the stamp of the parents' misery branded upon the face of the unborn child.

The woman had milked the cow, the woman had cleared off the rocks from their field, for she must assist her man. The woman had worked out in the cold spring rains, not one day but every day; they—his woman and her man—would have a family; they must live—his woman, her man, and his woman's and her man's family. Her man had been working on Distant View for Delane, laboring twenty hours some days. Her man could not help his woman at home, he pitied her, was kind to her—but the little unborn child showed the burden the mother had carried.

Kathleen knelt by the wooden box at the foot of the bed beside the baby.

The sky was clear now, the wind was down; the sun was shining on the drops of water glistening in the bright light, the herds lowed contentedly from the meadows, the birds circled about happily. Black Dick pawed the ground rebelliously and the balmy atmosphere of an October day breathed over the fresh earth again.

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE NEW TOWN.

"THERE is no further doubt, Kathleen; we are going to have a new town established here; you may depend upon it." Christ looked up from his books, and down upon Kathleen, who had just come in to the bank. Her eyes were more blue and truer, he told himself, as he gazed into them, her fluffy hair was more golden—it held a prisoner all the concentrated brightness of the sunlight.

"I have been unusually active advancing the movement now for almost a month, but success has come. Pete Mueller will build a blacksmith shop, the Gorys have decided upon leaving Lone, and opening up a restaurant here; it will be larger, more improved than their present one, Hanning and Flecher are to construct a large general store, Catling will have the post-office it is universally believed, Backen has planned on running an implement house, Graf has the feed and flour site secured, Hillins is debating on starting a drug store, White will own the lumber yard and the N. P. will be steaming in here inside of six weeks at the latest."

Kathleen, while taking off her hat, could only look astonishment. "Why didn't you tell me before Christ? You always tell me everything."

"I wanted to surprise you, and then I do not always tell you everything."

"Christ," her voice was entreating. "I have been under the impression a long time that you are concealing some secret from me. Is it true? Tell me, I feel I should know."

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He turned his gray eyes upon her trustingly ; they were as the eyes of a faithful dog turned toward his master's face.

Kathleen felt a pang of remorse in doubting this kind, noble-hearted cowboy, a Russian—he was the embodiment of all honor and every virtue—and resolved to place implicit confidence in him for the future, disregarding any acts of secretiveness. "Forgive me, Christ. I have been unduly unkind to you, but I thought you were not happy, and it grieved me. When will they commence work on the railroad?"

If Christ had known the right thing to do, he would either have left Our Bank and Kathleen, and the country, forever, or on the other hand, told Kathleen of his love, being only just to himself and her likewise in so doing. But he nourished a blind delusion that she was too young, too beautiful, too cultured to continue her life, her soul and her thoughts with his, untutored, untamed, uncouth as he considered himself to be.

"The work is in progress now ; they have nearly four miles of track laid already between here and Streeter. Half the distance would have been completed by this time, but there was a delay caused by a lack of material, which arrived two days later than expected. Help, too, was wanting, so many men being taken up by the harvest. The road would have been compelled to suspend operations if a train load had not come in from the East. Everything is moving forward rapidly at present, and no further hinderance intervening, we may look for the N. P. to be here at our door within two weeks, though the company places the date at six. And, Kathleen, what do you suppose the new town, our town here, is to be named?"

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"I could not say, I am sure; that is something I have given no attention to or thought about, being so occupied in Our Bank."

"Freeman!"

"Freeman?"

"Yes, Freeman. That is in honor of you, Kathleen. We wanted to show our appreciation to you for all you have done for us, all the sacrifices you are making every day in our behalf. We could arrive at nothing more appropriate than this; that the town you created should be named for you, and——"

"But, Christ, I don't want you to! This place belongs to your people, it lies among them. It should carry their name. Call it for some one of them: Schaeffer, Mueller or Larson. Anything at all, but not Freeman. That is not due me. I am not deserving of the good you and your people are accrediting to me. If I should accept all the homage and respect you and everyone are bestowing upon me, I would feel like a thief. I will be receiving what is not my due. It don't belong to me. I don't deserve it, and I——"

"Never mind, Kathleen; what is already done can't be helped. I have prepared myself for your opposition. Here!" and the cowboy held up a large sheet of paper before the girl. It was written closely on the two sides. "You might offer resistance to me, but you surely can't refuse the universal wish of all the people represented here, everyone signed. I did not go to them either—they came to me, every man of them; they say the new town here must be called Freeman. You can't hold out against this, can you?" The cowboy turned over the sheet of paper so Kathleen could see the other side. "There they are, over four hundred names in all."

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Kathleen blushed; for once she was too confused to speak immediately. The color came and went in her fair cheeks; she did not raise her eyes for some moments. She was indeed moved to a marked degree. When she did, they were bright with indescribable pleasure. "Thank you, Christ." Her voice broke and laying a small white hand on the cowboy's black sleeve, she looked into his eyes. "This is the happiest moment of my whole life; it seems to me now impossible to experience greater joy. I am rapturously happy."

Christ trembled. The gentle caress of that slender hand on his arm thrilled him with joy and hope. Perhaps she might care a little, perhaps she might even love. The flesh under his thin shirt where Kathleen's fingers had rested a short time before burned glowingly under the tender pressure of her hand. The cowboy went back to his books, a new joy, a fresh restlessness in his bosom. Perhaps! Who knows? Sometime? The figures were jiggling before his dancing eyes; his heart was playing the wildest music in his breast. Perhaps!

Toward evening—it was almost sunset—Christ and Kathleen were poring over the books. There was still some work they desired to finish before closing. Just then a man entered Our Bank; it was Marshall Stewart.

The casual looker-on would have sounded the one word "hobo," taking in only the frayed trousers, worn shoes, buttonless, collarless shirt, and the tanned face with the thick bristling stubble of beard under the faded and torn and almost brimless hat. A more cautious observer would note that, though brown, the cheeks were washed clean, immediately setting the stranger apart from the hobo class. The hair, which was heavy and uncut, was combed in place, the tattered clothes arranged on the body with

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care. Better than an ordinary tramp, they would be forced to grant in figuring out the proper status of the wanderer. But the student of humanity, critically surveying Marshall Stewart, being attracted by the intellectual forehead, firm, straight mouth, and the large characterful hands, would be forced to exclaim, "A gentleman."

Kathleen shook hands with Marshall, and introduced him to Christ. There was a distressing pause, for a moment, no one speaking. At length Stewart said, "I would like to talk with you a few moments by yourself Kathleen, may I?"

"Certainly, but don't mind Christ. We have no secrets from one another; we are fellow workingmen." An expression on Marshall's face gave the girl to understand that this was not satisfactory, that he desired to say things intended for her only, and she added: "but if you wish we can talk here outside of the door; no one will disturb us."

The interview was brief, not longer than a quarter of an hour. Christ within, behind the desk, over the books, could not catch their words; he could hear Marshall's voice, low, deep and despairing, pleading, and see that his eyes were entreating. That was all.

Kathleen he knew was saying little, but he fancied he saw flashes of encouragement and acquiescence flit across her face. He bent over his work with apparent industry, but his thoughts were on Kathleen and Stewart, standing before the bank in the fading sunset.

When Kathleen came in, she was depressed and thoughtful. "We had better put up the books for today, Christ. I am tired and we have worked enough now. This can be finished to-morrow, when we are more refreshed."

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Christ looked at her. "Heavens! She is as beautiful as an angel," he whispered under his breath. The cowboy was sincere in this belief; he who never before seen any women but the dark-skinned, black-haired, horny-handed creatures of his own race. "I love her, and if any man tries to take her away from me I will——" he made a fierce endeavor to check his thoughts, while he bit his lips cruelly. Then he closed the covers of the ledger without any delay, mounted his horse and rode home.

He went to bed early; the bed was soft with that downiness which only the deftness of a mother's hand has the ability of producing, but he could not rest. He laid his hot face and brow against the cool pillow in an effort to subdue the fever which was raging in his heart. Everything was in vain. The white, full moon came up in the east, each tiny star tripped out upon the blue sky, each tripped back again, and the moon sunk below the horizon; yet the cowboy was still lying awake.

Toward morning he fell asleep and in his dreams the torturing thoughts of the night were returned to him. In imagination he saw Kathleen married to Stewart; the low pleading voice that had reached him in the afternoon was sounding in his ears. Marshall loved Kathleen, she loved him in response.

Then the homicidal atom that is generated in every Russian heart at the time of its conception, whether in the palace or upon the barren steppes under the open sky, was aroused in Christ, as he lay asleep. In picture Kathleen was near him; her blue eyes were looking into his; he could feel the influence of her presence; the shining hair had fallen caressingly about the white neck. Convulsively, the murder demon working within, in fancy

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he seized the fair young throat in his strong hands, the stout fingers dug into the soft flesh, stifling the breath and crushing out the life of his victim.

Christ awoke suddenly to discover himself clutching the pillow in his hot hands. It was broad daylight. He dressed quickly, ate his breakfast still more quickly and rode to Our Bank. Kathleen was already there. He felt guilty of the crime he had perpetrated in his dreams, as the girl smiled upon him, yet unwillingly he found himself hungrily gazing at the white throat above the soft ribbon. The fiend was created, and often during the day he caught himself clutching his hands together involuntarily.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MAN FROM MONTANA.

THE breach between the two classes widened, though not very perceptibly. "The People" were satisfied in allowing the Herd to clamor for one dollar wheat, even content in permitting the formation of their association. Why should these actions cause them unrest? They had witnessed similar spurts of activity on the side of the commoners before, only to see them all go up in smoke. Moreover, they controlled the Legislature in the State, and had their own men in Washington. Why should they experience trepidation? Before their array of political leaders the Herd was powerless.

"Allow the trash to make their alliance; it fills them with gratification," said Gillen at Grand Forks one night, where the "People" were holding an annual banquet. "Moreover," he added with Nestorian wisdom, "while they are wildly exhausting their energy on this chimerical freedom, their forces will be latent to the primal cause of their servitude. But if they attempt to muddle in *our* politics we will call 'Hands off' in a voice loud enough to echo from Williams to Richland County."

If Delane and Gillen, and Wilson and others, thought Kathleen and her people, with Neilson and his crowd, intended to be docile upon State affairs, they were to be speedily disillusioned. As a smoldering fire oftenest breaks into the brightest flame, so a secretly active body carries the most strength.

The time for a reformation in North Dakota politics

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was ripe. Never before had the truth of its putrefaction been so universally made clear to the State's inmates. The notorious land deals of Delane, and others equally as important, the extortions of Wilson, the usurpations of Gillen, were all tossed from tongue to tongue through the length and breadth of the several counties.

The stories of Hainsborough, who had them all "skun," the man the Stalwarts had lodged in Washington at no small expense to themselves, his rascality and brutality in the Alaskan regions some years previous, were not left to stagnate; the Herd kept them alive and burning. Every child knew the history: the discrimination of the railroads, the elevators, the lawlessness of every combine and corporation which worked their devices in that tract of land bounded by South Dakota, the Missouri, Montana and the Dominion. This helpless parcel of territory, being in its infancy, seemingly must suffer all manner of frauds and abuses at the hands of greedy corruption. It was the old tale of all the new States in their building up.

Was it any wonder then that the leaders in the reform movement hunted diligently among their ranks for liberators? Men were sought out—strong, honest men, men of unquestionable integrity, irrespective of party or nation or belief, men from the industrious masses, whence comes the nation's only hope.

Each district was canvassed thoroughly, to procure the best men obtainable; these were to run on the independent ticket. Bryant, Weed, McCumber, Welsh, Taylor, Neilson, Fuller—names familiar to all Dakotians—were to appear on the reformer's ticket. Each district chose its candidates for assemblymen and state senator, only after

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careful investigation into each one's private and public life. If his character would not submit to close scrutiny he was tossed aside, leaving space for another more acceptable to the people. One man only, the candidate for governor, was received without inquiry. Indeed, probing into his past would have resulted fruitlessly. No one knew much of import about him; he had come early in September from near Portal, where he had been holding down a claim for two years. Previous to that he had lived in Montana, he said. Nobody knew his name, so—as is often true of the West—he passed off among those with whom he came in contact, simply as “the man from Montana.”

But he was a fulgent example of power and energy and usefulness. The one man, people said, to steer the ship of state safely by the rock of ruin. He was boomed eagerly throughout the country, and when he appeared in public was cheered vociferously. His principles were at complete variance with those framed and bolstered up by Delane and the Gillen works. Directly following his nomination, the last of September, the friction between the two parties increased with rapidity.

The People understood they had to combat a force, the more to be feared because they fought blindly, in ignorance of the strength of their antagonist. The classes clung fiercely to the old methods, adhering sacredly to the teachings of party, while diffusing money recklessly for the campaign fund.

On the other hand the Man from Montana had scheduled a new code of laws for North Dakota, should he become its governor. A formula which had for a foundation advantages to the many in place of the few. There would be regulation of railroad rates by the State,

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the State would be empowered to place the charge upon light, water and telephone utilities, restraining them within reasonable bounds. There would be better schools, better roads, more post offices, and rural delivery, where at all advisable.

The Man from Montana was the man of the hour. "Vote for the Man from Montana!" was the slogan of the people. "Vote for good government! Vote for justice! Vote for the best man in the State! In the United States! Vote for the Man from Montana!"

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CHAPTER XXXII.

THE N. P.

It was the eighth day of November, election day, on a Tuesday afternoon, that the N. P. was to send the engine down from Streeter on the new extension which had been lately built from that town to Freeman, located on Section 24, Range 69. This was an event that had been looked forward to with no small amount of anticipation by Russians, Finns, Swedes and Germans, in fact every one in that vicinity, for many weeks. It was also a signal triumph for Kathleen.

All the people for miles around had counted on turning out to give the new train a fitting welcome on this, its maiden appearance. Though the train was not expected sooner than 4 P. M., yet long before the noon hour the little town of Freeman was filled with farmers from the surrounding country.

The Russian women and girls wore the newest and the best of embroidered shawls over their carefully combed hair, the Russian men had put on their only suits, and the Finns plodded about clumsily in heavy sweltering shoes. Where discord had formerly existed between these nationalities, threatening at times to dis sever every bond of friendliness, harmony was now prevailing and soldering the links firmly. Kathleen was in their midst, radiant with happiness. Thus far every undertaking had been a success; the arrival of the new train in the new town of Freeman was the culmination.

The new steel rails glistened in the autumn sunlight,

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the prairie soil pillaged of its opulent harvest, turned only a bristling stubble toward a cloudless sky. Some hills black with a charred vegetation were adjacent to grass ripe meadows, while mountains of golden straw sprinkled the peaceful plains in careless irregularity.

It was 4 o'clock—some minutes after others asserted—when the first trace of vapory smoke darkened the sky; the train was distant one mile or more perhaps; at 4.03 authentically it came around the high hill by the New Ranch, steaming proudly into the view of the four hundred spectators.

"I never yet knew one thing to come at a time!" This from Mayme Richards, in her blue dress with red roses, the moss roses, as she laughed a laugh overburdened with happiness, but so unmusical that it was distressing also. "Honest, girls, everything good seems to come to once; Ma says so; while the bad things always hangs together, too. It's just grand, if you only knew all about it. But I almost hate to tell you, but then." Mayme blushed and the deep crimson under the tanned cheeks glowed, "but maybe I ought to; it might be best to blurt it right out; Ma says so," and Mayme dropped her head. "I'm going to be married, girls, but you bet when Jimmie Murphy popped the question I thought I'd bust."

The train was approaching; already the throbbing of its ponderous piston-rods could be felt, the prairies pulsed under the massive pressure of the giant driving wheels.

"That's a pretty good little piece of business; I like it pretty much."

"My mother, he said, I could ride on him onst, if I take the money I was to borrow from Our Bank already."

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"Kathleen is a pretty nice leetle geerl; I like her pretty much."

"My mother, he likes Kathleen wery well, he said so onst already."

Snugged closely in double and triple tiers for a half mile down the tracks, or in groups of ten or more elbowing one with the other, were packed the Herd, a motley mixture. There was old man Mueller, grasping his three-year-old grandson tightly by a dirty little hand; there, too, was Hans Jerry Von Schmoot, with his sister and his sister's man, and his young sister, his brother Lengthy, his mamma and Jerry's papa also, likewise Jerry's woman; Matti in his red hat, with his wife and child; Ole Rue, Victor Anderson, Jakie Deutcher and Fritz Catling could be counted among the throng. Everybody brought their wives that had any, and those that had none, brought their sweethearts. Old Pfipley munched greedily at a glossy big sunflower blossom. Lena Backen, a Russian girl born twenty years before, in this country, stared foolishly about; her whole life had been on a claim with her parents forty miles from town, ten miles from any neighbors. The new train had drawn her forth from the confines of her narrow 160-acre home, as the warm sun draws out the imprisoned buds from their enclosures. The throng of people, and the resplendent train were a revelation to her.

At length the engine gave one long, dull, deep whistle, the people in front, being close to the tracks pressed backwards, forcing those behind with them. Then something happened. No one was capable of relating just how it occurred—it happened, that was all that was known. Though they were crowding away, yet a man stumbling in front of the rapidly advancing train, was

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rescued by another, the preserver becoming victim of the relentless steam juggernaut. Christ was the hero, flung out of the way by the great engine.

No cry, no groan, no moan, no sigh was audible to Kathleen, as she knelt beside Christ, binding up the wounded head with her own handkerchief, with tenderest touch. The heavy black hair was matted with blood, so she moved it aside gently; deep gashes were cut in the strong brown arms; pieces of the faded black shirt were imbedded in the wounds. Though the left leg, pitifully bruised and the foot with it mercilessly crushed, trembled and quivered with the intensity of pain, yet the cowboy smiled, displaying small even white teeth, while the calm gray eyes brightened with happiness as the girl cared for him tenderly in his helplessness.

It had been an effort for Christ—the struggle carried on in that innocent heart would never be comprehended. For a moment it was as though hell raged within him; it was a battle of the God within him against the devil. He had seen Marshall Stewart when he staggered to the tracks. Marshall was intoxicated, and the cowboy was not in ignorance of it.

Again the homicidal germ which is the inheritance of his race was awakened. With Stewart blotted out, Kathleen might some day be his; it might be weeks, or months could pass, even years might elapse, if only at some time, however remote, he would be happy with her. They had the same interests; they could work together. They would own a little place, it might be humble, very humble, but it would be home—their home, his and Kathleen's. Trials and privations and sufferings would attack them, but the girl was brave, very brave and good; she would

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be his woman, his very own, all through life, perhaps; if only Stewart were away.

By this time Marshall was struggling hopelessly on the ties.

They would live on the Flat where he and his mother now lived; they would be married in the little blue church over the trail from his home, the pretty little church with the stained windows. They would attend services there every Sunday; he and Kathleen would sit in the fifth pew, his pew, his neighbors and friends, the other Russians would be there also. Perhaps some time there would be children too, with blue eyes and light fluffy hair, like Kathleen's. These same children would go to school on the Flat, when they became older, in the schoolhouse where he had received his meagre education, by the field just opposite his dung barns. The same children would grow into men and women, great men and women; he and his woman would struggle incessantly to give them every advantage. These children in turn would desert them, seeking shelter under other roofs, choosing other mates. He and Kathleen would be left alone; he would be old and crippled; she might be wrinkled and worn, but they would love each other; he would protect her, caress her, shield her as faithfully as in youth. She would be kind, be tender, be true—his woman.

Christ's brain reeled with the wild joy of imagination. The next instant discovered him pale and wild-eyed, the black curls dripping with a cold perspiration, and falling in heavy clinging drops down upon the black faded shirt, rolling unheeded in small ripples upon the clenched brown hands. Some force within demanded that he rescue Marshall Stewart, his enemy and rival; a more powerful voice commanded that he must permit him to die.

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The train was only a few yards distant from its prey, two seconds more, one second, instantly—Marshall Stewart would be ground under the massive revolving wheels!

Struggling, raging, seething, the armies of a God and devil surged within the cowboy, during those terrible seconds of hesitancy; tumbling, wrestling as two mighty antagonists they mutilated the boy's being, first one then the other was above or beneath, back and forth they rolled over the floor of his conscience with varied fortunes—it seemed for hours, though it was but seconds.

Suddenly his agitation ceased, and, giving Kathleen one glance he threw his strong body against Marshall's tottering form with great violence, hurling the man with force off the ties over the rails upon the prairies.

He tried to recover himself, but was a fraction of a second too late. The pilot struck him, and threw his mangled body remorselessly to one side.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RETURNS.

It was 9 o'clock, and the little depot of Freeman was packed; one would say to the point of combustion, if such a thing were possible, by the men of Logan and Stutsman and McIntosh counties, awaiting the returns of election. The noses of as many children as could not any too conveniently find space, were pressed against the panes of the three windows in the station, from their positions outside.

While the night without was clear and cool with the crispness of autumn, a North Dakota autumn, which is individual in its freshness, the air within that small room was close and oppressive. Even foul and offensive it was to the sturdy landsman whose wide open nostrils betrayed the vigor of his giant body and the honesty of his faithful life.

A hundred atmospheres were pressed down upon the throng assembled there; the density of which was augmented by the intensity of suspense traced upon the face of each man, and upon his neighbor's beside him, even upon the faces glued as it were, to the outside of window light. These had grasped the contagion from their fathers; the situation was grave, though the little ones could not in the fullest comprehend its gravity. They were silent because their fathers were mute; they had a sedate mien, because their fathers were serious.

"Click, click, click," went the wires. Dougherty, the youth at the keys, bent over his desk. The men, who

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some moments earlier had unwillingly displayed their weariness by stretching cramped legs, shifting tired feet or rubbing chins that prickled with excitement, held their breath. Old Pipeley, who was about to expectorate, refrained, swallowing tobacco juice, quid and all like a hero, without a gurgle, though his face grew purple in the struggle.

"Click, click, click!" Dougherty's clean-shaven, finely chiselled, mobile face grew white; the muscles about his thin lips twitched involuntarily as he took the message.

He came toward the office window with the scrap of yellow paper fluttering between his trembling fingers. But not one man in the room without moved a muscle, yet they studied Dougherty's face with eyes that would have pierced his heart with two hundred darts, had they been as many arrows.

"It's from Jamestown, boys. In Logan, Stutsmans, McIntosh, Kidder and LaMoure, we have beaten them straight. Davidson's up over his ears in water in these five counties. The Man from Montana wins out over him by 4,000 majority. We have our State Senator too, Bryant."

The young man stopped speaking as suddenly as he had begun, calmly folded up the telegram, creasing it evenly in a perfect oblong, turned briskly and walked noiselessly back to the board.

The men were speechless, emitting not a sound. Though their cause was gloriously won in their own locality, what a small percentage they really represented in the end. Simultaneously it came to each of them, how insignificant was his individual power, alone! The tension which had been raised momentarily came again upon

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the waiters, and the atmosphere settled upon them again with increased austerity.

One more hour elapsed; no sound was audible save the peevish tapping of Dougherty's long fingers on the desk near him, or a quick-drawn breath from one of the men outside. A few minutes after 10 o'clock the wires clicked merrily, innocently ignorant of the value of their message.

The operator took the words instantly. His voice when he spoke betrayed his agitation. "From Fargo: We've carried—for Governor, the south of the State completely—Ransom, Sargent, Dickey, Barnes, Cass and Steele are with us. We lead out by 2,500, but lost on all other State candidates to the Stalwarts."

The farmers were silent, contrary to Delane's prediction that they would howl like famished coyotes if they carried one county.

"The beasts will think, if Logan wins on that lout from Montana, it will give him the right to installation in the executive mansion at once. It's always the way with such fools; they do not possess the brains of an infant, owning the ability of seeing only that which lies before them, unable to look beyond their line of vision, where the richest treasures are ever concealed."

Delane proud of his similes and philosophy. This little speech was a masterpiece, he told himself. He repeated it to every friend he met, and when alone went over it to himself many times during the day.

It was 12 o'clock; the station had grown cold, the flame of the only lamp at Dougherty's elbow was becoming dim, partly because the oil in it was getting low; then too its chimney was coated thickly from its own smoke. Many of the younger children, overcome with

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fatigue, had lain down exhausted upon the wide board platform, which ran about the depot on three sides. The older boys, disdaining to display such evidences of infantile weakness, leaned dazedly against the building, standing with bleared sightless eyes; and as yet no word had come from Grand Forks, Bismarck or the Williston District.

The Herd had been confident of winning in the south, hopeful of holding its own in the Bismarck locality, but of the Grand Forks region, where Gillen had dumped a good-sized fortune in campaigning, it was dubious; of the provinces about Williston, where Davidson hailed from, it was almost hopeless. With Williams County, Renville, Ward, Bottineau, Rolette and Towner the decision rested. How often do we hold in the highest esteem the man who hails from our own locality? He may have push, may have risen through his own efforts, may have accumulated money, may be pointed out as a man who does things, may be strong enough to fight his way through almost every opposition, may be able to extricate himself from tight places, may have done all this while still a comparatively young man, and yet, be wanting in integrity, the one atom in the foundation of humanity which raises it up and beyond. We feel a foolish local pride, mock pride it frequently is, in seeing such a one's advancement. Such a man was Davidson, in entirety. Such was the idle pride that filled the hearts of the Herd up north beyond Mandan, leading them to back their man, while forcing the vouchers for the Man from Montana into a state of supreme suspense as they waited.

After midnight word came from Williston; Davidson was sweeping the country—8,000 majority showed up already, 4,000 more was probable. Between 12 and 1 news

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came from Bismarck, stating the candidates to be running evenly thereabouts. One county figuring up fifty in Davidson's favor, a bordering county adding fifty to the score of the Man from Montana. At 2 o'clock the counts stood nearly 6,000 in favor of Davidson, but Grand Forks had not reported; the wires in that region had been out of order, necessitating the sending of the message by a longer and broken route. The denouement boded ill for the Herd. For was it not about Grand Forks that Gillen had poured out his gold like Croesus? At 3 o'clock, the wires sounded again, rather unsteadily; Dougherty did not breathe as he caught the meaning. It was brief—"Man from Montana 15,000 ahead; gaining."

One moment of quiet. Then the depot rang with the vigorous cheers from two hundred lusty throats. The children outside leaped to their feet, now fully awake and shouting. The sound circled through the little town, around, around, in one mad ceaseless voice, reached out upon the prairies, rolled out upon the shadowy trails, beat upon the distant moon-tipped hills, floating back again to the little station in a softened, mellow, silvery, tinkling echo.

"The Man from Montana is Governor," announced Dougherty, in a voice that carried a strange tremor. "And now, boys, here's a surprise. This Man from Montana whom you have all so loyally supported will address you to-morrow at Jamestown; for which privilege you may extend thanks to Kathleen."

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

DELANE FAILS.

"I KNEW things was sure ter go ter the dogs if we hadn't Bobbie eround. I knew soon as his carcass left this here Ranch things couldn't be run, I did. I told Delane too, that sure as Bobbie is er dead animal that the place couldn't run without Bobbie. It's all come ter happen, jest as I said; it has. Hain't yer hern erbout it? Yer haint? Holy gee, sir! I thought every one knowed erbout it, I did. Wall, yer see, Delane's a mighty crooked cuss, he is, all the people knows it, but they don't all say, they don't. Delane's ben a kind of er power in these here parts, he has, fer some years back, but things is slippin' away from him like water through a sieve. He ain't got no pull ter speak of since that there mixup he got inter up in the State, he ain't. Wanter hear erbout it, sir, does yer? Delane has some big business up in the State, he has—banks, land offices, elevators and such things.

"He's ben doin' mighty well there this last ten year or more. Ben rollin' in the coin in handfuls, he has. His name carried him most anywhar then, he ruled the perlitical roost ter some extent, but he war er man what always did his work a little under cover, so nobody ever could catch on ter his doings, he did. He war interested in cattle them days, too, he was. Giminey! he sartin did make them custom officers do some high steppin', he did. He'd flaunt a bunch of them yeller twenties in their faces afore he'd tackle ter bring er bunch o' Angus over the

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border. Duty would run pretty low fer Delane, sich times, yer can bet. Them stock inspectors danced ter his music too; a handful of bills looked kinder good ter them. All them fellers has er way er puttin' their consciences ter sleep periodically, they has. But sence Bobbie war shot things has been going against Delane. Of late, first one thing would turn up, then another. Misfortunes has been laying hold of Delane these last few weeks, swarming around him like bees 'round er hive. Delane's ben a fearful crooked man, he has!"

Broze drew the sombrero tightly over his forehead, gave the brim one additional jerk, as in mind he went hastily over Delane's career, during the last thirty years he had known him. There was deceit and betrayal to his employer in those remote days; later there were extortions, concealments. Bribes and perjuries, most recent in the past month, had come bold, reckless lawlessness, simple horse thieving, stealing. Delane had allied himself with a band of rustlers; he was commander of the ring, its head, its advisor.

"So yer hain't hern erbout it, hain't yer? Yer sartin must be er stranger' bout here, yer must. I'll tell yer erbout it pard ef yer ker ter listen." Broze smiled a hard smile. "If we only hed Bobbie eround. Yer see, sir, it all occurred up here north in the State. There's some pretty desperate fellers up that way, there is. Some war half bloods, others come over the line from the Dominion, others, a feller er two war a white man from Frisco, a daring devil. The boys named him Firebrand; the title fitted him too, it did. He was a cuss that feared nothing, the devil hisself couldn't o' skeered him, he couldn't. There war six in the bunch, but Delane kinder picked out this one, Firebrand, as his man; he liked his ap-

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pearance. Then too, he had had more experience along the rustling line; he'd did work through Montana fer a good many years; later he went to Frisco, and only last fall he showed up again, he did. He had gathered up five men, six with himself; they operated a good bit by themselves, carried it on pretty successful too, they did.

"Towards winter, or late in the autumn, Firebrand come under Delane's observation. Delane spotted him ter once, took him inter his confidence, put him onter a good bunch of animals up near ter Williston or thereabouts. Delane war ter git the bulk of the profits, the outfit a liberal commission. Delane urged them to work rapidly, cover their tracks carefully, he did; he argued thar war small chance fer discovery then. Things went ter movin' their way fer er spell, they did; a month or two they landed in several hundred dollars fer Delane and theirselves. They rustled all through the State, they did, hustling their plunder down the State and outer reach. Beginning ter feel secure, they got reckless, and one night they war ketched, Delane with the outfit. Delane thought his former influence would carry him through, he did; he struggled ter uncoil hissself from the charges against him, but he war found with the goods, and no chance war offered ter him. There war nothing fer him ter do but face the music, there warn't. Somehow, facing the music didn't jest suit Delane, it didn't; he hain't er man what's got much music in his make-up at the best, he hasn't; then the tunes that war set up fer him warn't jest ter his liking, they war'nt.

"Things went hard on Delane, his interests up State fell down pretty rapid, he took ter another part of the country, hoping ter live down his disgrace, but somehow that thar disgrace o' his'n refused ter be shook off, it did.

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It war determined ter stick ter Delane like fleas ter er dog. Before he got ter anywhar his disgrace and reputation landed in the town afore he did, it did. Wonderful how er man's wrongdoings ken be in so many places ter once, isn't it? Holy gee! Delane war puffed up bigger'n a toad them days, he war proud as a peacock, too, he war; but them times is past. He ain't worth nothing ter hisself or anybody else these days. He shook the Dakota dust from his hoofs and went ter Montana, he did; tried ter continue business thar but 'twere ter no account. People thar had hern o' him and didn't hev the slightest inclination ter mix up with him er his gang. They booked him ter the first as bein' dead wrong, they did, and no one could change their opinion.

"But, by gosh, stranger, that warn't the end o' difficulties. The Government took after his heels too, he's down debtor ter them fer some few deeds, he is. Yer know that thar niece er his'n has ben castin' a little light on his darned crooked dealings with the settlers out Ditsant View locality. The Supreme Court got er scent on him, and they're on his trail, they are. All his duckings and dodgings won't be ter no account when he's got Uncle Sam ter buck up aganst. Most likely he'll come ter discover, he will, that he ain't a dealin' with er helpless bunch o' foreigners. The Government's a different outfit, yer ken bet, yer ken. I told Delane jest how it would go, I did, when he hadn't Bobbie eround. I knowed the Ranch couldn't run without Bobbie, I did. Nor that ain't all what's happened ter Delane, it isn't. Hain't yer heerd, sir, how the fire took after him too? Yer hasn't? Waal, sir, er fire cleared out Distant View only last week, here, swallowed up everything in sight, it did, except that thar new granary that war built this

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here fall, and the cattle what were out on the range—barns, hospital, house, machine shed, every stick o' straw and hay on the whole blamed Ranch war took, it war. Delane's kinder down in the mouth over things, he is, beginning ter feel my words is true.

"That place couldn't run without Bobbie, I knowed. Yes, sir, jest as I said, everything war took but the new granary, it war. Ter some folks it might seem sorter pitiful ter see Delane hangin' 'round that thar building, it might, the only thing that's left standin' on the ground, it is. Maybe I orter git sorry fer him, maybe I orter, but by gimney, stranger, I ken't do it, sir, when I thinks on that thar old hoss, thinks on him murdered in cold blood by that man Delane, the pity in my soul begins ter shrink, it does, and holy gee, it gits so small it works out through the soles o' my boots, it does, and, by gosh, sir, it's an awful thing ter say, but I experiences no pity, not a bit, I don't, when Delane moves in and out o' that thar flax granary so heartbroken like. It's most all he has ter his name now is Distant View, and that one lone building, it is. But, sir, I knowed things would go ter ther dogs if we hadn't Bobbie eround."

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CHAPTER XXXV.

STEWART'S VOW.

It was midnight. Midnight at the best, under most favorable conditions, is not an unusually welcome period of time in the day's cycle of hours. There is something almost unwholesome in its contemplation only, without regarding its actual existence. Midnight on the prairies, the great Western prairies, alone, has been found by those having tasted the experience to be indescribable by either tongue or pen. Something, a sensation dissimilar to any previously encountered, creeps into one's anatomy, permeating all the fibres and tissues, diffusing its subtle magnetism through mind and soul and body, lifting one up and away from this prosaic life; meanwhile tucking about one the blackest blanket of desolation, solitude and isolation.

The agony one endures, as with strained eyes he watches a friend disappear into a mere dot, vanishing down the indistinct trail; the torture undergone by one on the Western plains, as a high hill suddenly cuts off from one's gaze the only human face for miles surrounding, is trivial indeed, when brought into comparison with the hopeless dejection of a person alone at midnight on those abandoned boundless areas of lands. The sky above, the earth beneath, both vast and unlimited, suggest incalculable distances of nothingness—eternal voids in every direction.

The stillness is awful; we feel that it is appalling, but it can not be driven away. Cold, friendless, heartless stars

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only mock one's loneliness; other spots, other lands, other worlds are teeming with life and action. The birds have their mates, the animals their companions, everything in nature has sought out its affinity. But exiled from humanity, one atom on the world's surface alone, alone, with nothing but the lands and the sky and nature.

It is a psychological fact that a murderer often returns to the scenes of his crimes; it is also a psychological truth that mankind is attracted to gruesome vicinities by gruesome occurrences. After the cowboy had been injured by the N. P. train in rescuing his inebriate rival. Marshall Stewart rapidly came into possession of his senses, but it was not until the people were gone and Christ removed to his home, and it had grown into night, midnight, that Stewart understood with full realization the completeness of the tragedy that had been enacted.

He did not go to bed that night; instead he walked out upon the plains, following one trail, then another. He went over to the neighborhood of the New Ranch; down at the spring he drank the cool water out of the hollow of his hand; he dashed the clear liquid in handfuls over his face and head and bare arms; he ran down the big hill near the house into the meadow spot below, the meadow which lies on Broze's claim. Panting for breath he rushed up an opposite acclivity; gaining a flat he sat down upon the ruins of an old sod hut. It had been constructed by Jerry's youngest sister with her own hands, when she first came from Russia, but had collapsed after a year or two; a second had now been built some rods away from the first.

The sky was blue and cloudless, the stars appeared bigger and brighter and more numerous than Stewart had ever before noticed. The large white moon, just

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come up in the East, was prosperous looking, the night was light as day. Wolves were howling behind the big hills that lay back to the north of where Marshall was resting. The ripe dry grass about him, rustled weirdly; there was an uncanniness in the night's beauty. For an hour the man remained among the ruins. After a time his hand came in contact with a cold moist sod. He started, but settled back not too comfortably; he was alarmed at his own timidity. Another hour, almost, passed over him; the brittle grass at his feet crackled, and jumping up he ran quickly down a trail that led to the south and west. On, on he went, unheeding, uncaring where the course took him. It was a futile endeavor to escape from self, his conscience, his being.

Arriving at the place where the cowboy had been injured, he halted suddenly. He wanted to be away, but some impelling charm prevented him. The blood on the new steel was visible in the moonlight. Stewart was about to place his hand on the dark stains when he paused; they were too sacred to be polluted by him. He looked about. A tiny track of blood was to be seen on the high grass; it led out some yards from the track and traced out the way they had carried Christ to his wagon to return him home.

The boy's gray sombrero lay out on the prairies some distance from the rails; no one had thought to pick it up. Stewart went over, raised it reverently, and found that it too was spattered with blood. He shuddered and turned away. Some power was laying hold of him, whether spiritual or natural he was unable to determine. He fell on his knees, pressing his hands **tightly over** his eyes; after a brief meditation he came to his feet again, his mind and soul had undergone a revolution in that

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short moment of contemplation. Marshall Stewart was translated back to the man he had been, back to the man nature had designed him to be, back to the man he had created and nourished in boyhood, back to the Marshall Stewart who had defied Delane, back to the man who had willed to be a success.

Standing erect, his massive form in an attitude of dignified supplication to a higher power, he raised his right hand high above his head, and his voice was firm and steady:

"I swear by these hills, I swear by these valleys, I swear by the moon and the stars, I swear by all nature and by all living things, and these prairies to-night, by the cattle herds and the sheep herds on the plains, by those howling wolves among the foot hills, by the hawks and crows and hungry cranes, by the animals in the earth beneath me, by the bleached bones of the departed here, by all things here present, animate or inanimate, living or dead, to never touch liquor in any form whatever as long as I exist, to live up to the nobility that is born in every man, to be as the first principles of the creation intended, be a man and a success—so help me God!"

Marshall turned suddenly to the north and walked to Streeter, where he hired Shauer to take him to Jamestown, for had he not promised Kathleen that the Man from Montana would address the Herd there. He could not disappoint the girl and her people.

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"So yer hain't hern erbout it, hain't yer? Yer sartin must be er stranger' bout here, yer must. I'll tell yer erbout it pard ef yer ker ter listen." Broze smiled a hard smile. "If we only hed Bobbie eround. Yer see, sir, it all occurred up here north in the State. There's some pretty desperate fellers up that way, there is. Some war half bloods, others come over the line from the Dominion, others, a feller er two war a white man from Frisco, a daring devil. The boys named him Firebrand; the title fitted him too, it did. He was a cuss that feared nothing, the devil hisself couldn't o' skeered him, he couldn't. There war six in the bunch, but Delane kinder picked out this one, Firebrand, as his man; he liked his ap-

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pearance. Then too, he had had more experience along the rustling line; he'd did work through Montana fer a good many years; later he went to Frisco, and only last fall he showed up again, he did. He had gathered up five men, six with himself; they operated a good bit by themselves, carried it on pretty successful too, they did.

"Towards winter, or late in the autumn, Firebrand come under Delane's observation. Delane spotted him ter once, took him inter his confidence, put him onter a good bunch of animals up near ter Williston or thereabouts. Delane war ter git the bulk of the profits, the outfit a liberal commission. Delane urged them to work rapidly, cover their tracks carefully, he did; he argued thar war small chance fer discovery then. Things went ter movin' their way fer er spell, they did; a month or two they landed in several hundred dollars fer Delane and theirselves. They rustled all through the State, they did, hustling their plunder down the State and outer reach. Beginning ter feel secure, they got reckless, and one night they war ketched, Delane with the outfit. Delane thought his former influence would carry him through, he did; he struggled ter uncoil hisself from the charges against him, but he war found with the goods, and no chance war offered ter him. There war nothing fer him ter do but face the music, there warn't. Somehow, facing the music didn't jest suit Delane, it didn't; he hain't er man what's got much music in his make-up at the best, he hasn't; then the tunes that war set up fer him warn't jest ter his liking, they war'nt.

"Things went hard on Delane, his interests up State fell down pretty rapid, he took ter another part of the country, hoping ter live down his disgrace, but somehow that thar disgrace o' his'n refused ter be shook off, it did.

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border. Duty would run pretty low fer Delane, sich times, yer can bet. Them stock inspectors danced ter his music too; a handful of bills looked kinder good ter them. All them fellers has er way er puttin' their consciences ter sleep periodically, they has. But sence Bobbie war shot things has been going against Delane. Of late, first one thing would turn up, then another. Misfortunes has been laying hold of Delane these last few weeks, swarming around him like bees 'round er hive. Delane's ben a fearful crooked man, he has!"

Broze drew the sombrero tightly over his forehead, gave the brim one additional jerk, as in mind he went hastily over Delane's career, during the last thirty years he had known him. There was deceit and betrayal to his employer in those remote days; later there were extortions, concealments. Bribes and perjuries, most recent in the past month, had come bold, reckless lawlessness, simple horse thieving, stealing. Delane had allied himself with a band of rustlers; he was commander of the ring, its head, its advisor.

"So yer hain't hern erbout it, hain't yer? Yer sartin must be er stranger' bout here, yer must. I'll tell yer erbout it pard ef yer ker ter listen." Broze smiled a hard smile. "If we only hed Bobbie eround. Yer see, sir, it all occurred up here north in the State. There's some pretty desperate fellers up that way, there is. Some war half bloods, others come over the line from the Dominion, others, a feller er two war a white man from Frisco, a daring devil. The boys named him Firebrand; the title fitted him too, it did. He was a cuss that feared nothing, the devil hisself couldn't o' skeered him, he couldn't. There war six in the bunch, but Delane kinder picked out this one, Firebrand, as his man; he liked his ap-

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pearance. Then too, he had had more experience along the rustling line; he'd did work through Montana fer a good many years; later he went to Frisco, and only last fall he showed up again, he did. He had gathered up five men, six with himself; they operated a good bit by themselves, carried it on pretty successful too, they did.

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nature, it's yer a standin' thar beside that infernal machine of yern, in them togs, askin' somebody ter help yer out, it is. There's something wrong with yer own gearin', or ye'd straighten yerself out, jump onter a buckin' broncho, and ker fer yerself, yer would. 'Scuse me, boy, I'll tow yer out the country. Thar's a bunch o' Herefords comin' down the trail; if they got sight o' yer there's most likely ter be a stampede, thar would, and yer'd never show up again, yer're tu rare a specimen ter strew 'round on the prairies, yer are. I'd like yer preserved so I could amuse myself gazing at yer once in a while, I would. Come on here, sonnie, jump on behind. I don't know ef Buckin' Beast will stand fer yer company or not, I don't, but we'll make the test."

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

DEAD.

DELANE in prosperity would attribute none of his success to a gracious duty nor would he accredit a propitious fate with having any hand in his welfare; even luck was not recognized by him as being practically responsible. But Delane unfortunate, his wealth and power slipping away from him, crushed in spirit, blasphemed God, cursed fate and damned everything.

"Give me one more chance; let me come back to where I was once; let me have power once more, I will lash them into line!" This he shrieked one night when he had received notice that all his former possessions were gone, and that Distant View, the last to which he held title, must be yielded up. "We will be lenient; you deserve a severe penalty, but surrender up everything without resistance, then vanish, annihilate yourself to all appearances. That is your only hope.

Like a hunted animal concealing itself from hounds, Delane wandered over miles and miles of prairie trails, that ran criss-cross in every direction on Distant View. Hesitating, he delayed his flight from day to day, and at night crawled into what was formerly his flax granary, a fugitive. It was the season for the annual fall round up, when the cattle were sought out from the distant ranges and brought into the enclosed pastures bordering on Distant View. The cowboys were alert, lassoing this big red steer for separation from the rest of the herd, roping a heavy Angus for inspection, cutting out

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some of the late spring calves from the remainder of the bunch, to devote upon them especial care through the approaching winter, and the like. Loud were the calls of the herders, wildly flew the rivalling bronchos, up and down high hills, in mad race to excel their companions.

There was life and dash as the dexterous riders sped over the ground above clattering hoofs. The horses stretched out their necks, keeping close to the earth, straining every muscle, in an endeavor for supremacy on the home run. The cowboys laughed good naturedly and cheered hilariously as one of their number came in, not more than the smallest fraction of an inch ahead. But he was winner. Clouds of dust rose up like volumes of smoke into the clear sky, as the cattle—three thousand head or more—dragged tardy feet along in the dust-trail. Some, infuriated, pawed up the sod about them angrily, causing puffs of dust to rise in circles above them. Some of the cowboys urged along the stragglers, usually a weak late spring calf or some steer that had served a term in the stock hospital. Among the rear end of the herd there often was a cow with a young calf, which she insisted upon guarding foolishly, licking its black moist nose with her rough tongue, turning often to see if it followed, but more often to lower a broad head at the cattle dog, and not infrequently defying the plucky little broncho keeping close to her heels.

The monotony and loneliness the bowboys had known through the long summer was past, and the thousands of hills were alive, resounding with their mirthfulness. But Delane, who had always in previous years watched with anticipation the arrival of the herds from the hills, was apparently in ignorance of their approach. Though

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the herd was distant five miles, the cloud of dust raised by their thousands of feet heralded their advance to the tutored rangeman. Delane, gazing at the density of the air over the line of elevations, concluded there must be a fire in the vicinity of Streeter, and stole into the flax granary, seeking refuge for the night.

It was the sunset hour. But the sun never sets on the plain—it disappears, dropping below the horizon so abruptly that one is rarely conscious of its absence, the light still remaining. The cowboys had first intended to camp out that night, grazing the herd in the sheltering valleys until daylight, when they could yard better, separate more readily and to greater advantage, turning each section into their respective corrals, and later into the several enclosed pastures near by; but at nearly sundown they arrived at different arrangements among themselves, concluding that it would be more satisfactory to get them to Distant View that night.

There was hallooming and calling, and no small amount of kiing as the cowboys urged on the lazy cattle. A flock of three hundred or more of cranes, arising from the stubble fields or an alkali lake close at hand, mingled their hoarse rasping voices with those of the herders and the lowing of the stock. The cattle dog barked noisily, as he rounded up the laggards on the rear end and outskirts; the clattering of the bronchos' hoofs increased, while the hills and the plains echoed with the volume of varied sounds. But alone in the granary, in the darkness, with the rodents and spiders as vigilants, was Delane, sucked into the eagerly devouring flax, which was above him, below, on both sides, embracing, caressing, consuming him—dead!

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN AVOWAL.

"Kathleen!"

"Yes."

"Kathleen!"

"Yes, Christ, I am here."

The cowboy opened his eyes in consciousness for the first time since he had been injured a week before.

"I am glad to see you here, Kathleen. Did you just come?"

"No. I have been here."

"How long?"

"One week."

"Then I have been sick a week. To-day is Thursday, the fifteenth?"

There was a pause in their conversation. Christ was collecting his dislodged thoughts. Kathleen was anxiously watching the changes on the face in the bed beside her. The doctor had said everything depended upon his condition when consciousness returned.

"A week is a long time when one cannot be up and working, isn't it, Kathleen?"

"Yes, indeed, Christ," answered the girl without taking her eyes from him.

"Who is taking care of Our Bank since you and I are both away?"

"Our Bank is doing nicely. Adam is in there."

"But who is looking after our people? Has their grain been disposed of yet?"

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"Every one is doing well and everything is going on exactly as though we were with them. Don't let any affairs disturb you, Christ."

"And how is mother? Does my injury trouble her?"

"Your mother is in her room. I sent her away while you were sleeping. She is tired, poor woman. But mothers, especially when they grow old, will be anxious when their boys are sick."

"Poor mother." Christ turned his face toward the wall, the autumn sunlight streaming in through the one low window in the room, and cast a mellow halo-like light over the dark curls and pale countenance. He lay quiet, motionless for some time. Kathleen beside him noted the short rapid breathing, as the bed coverings rose and fell above him; she noticed also the flush which came and went in the cheeks, the brown hands moving restlessly over each other and tugging nervously at the coverlet.

"Kathleen,"—he looked into her eyes—"Kathleen!" His voice was low, and she was compelled to lean close over him to gather his words. His voice seemed filled with a torturing agony suited to the pathetic appeal in the usually calm eyes. "Did I save him, Kathleen?"

"Stewart? Yes, my brave boy, you saved him. You are a hero, Christ." Kathleen had longed to tell the cowboy how she admired his heroism, but had refrained, fearing any reference to Stewart might disturb him, renewing freshly his accident. She spoke with intense feeling. "You are a hero, Christ, such as I have always wished but never hoped to meet. You are *my* hero!"

Her words and the accompanying look thrilled the boy and made him happy; he smiled, but momentarily the smile disappeared, and the distress returned.

"I did it for you, Kathleen," he said. The words came

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thickly, chokingly, but the eyes were without moisture. "It was the least I could do for you, Kathleen. I desired your happiness." The boy tried to be brave but his voice was breaking at every syllable. "I knew he was equal to you in family and wealth and position. I knew you would never be ashamed of him, while I am only a cowboy, a Russian, no one, nobody. He is everything; I am nothing. But, my God, Kathleen you will never know what it cost me! I love you, Kathleen; forgive me for telling you. But is it wrong, Kathleen? Is it a sin? Is it wrong to love you, Kathleen?"

The girl had found satisfaction in Southland's admiration; she had sought to discover her ideal of manliness in Stewart, when in the beginning she had become acquainted with him. But he had failed her; now she realized that the hero who had failed to develop her in two former instances had appeared in the form of the cowboy lying before her, crippled and mangled, concealing his torture from her, except as the sensitive muscles involuntarily twitched under the fearful pressure of pain. Telling her of his innocent love, yet begging pardon for its confession. Here, in this Russian, uneducated yet refined, ignorant, yet the acme of culture, a cowboy, a product of the plains, she had come upon the object of her search unexpectedly, one who recognized right and had the courage to follow its dictation. It was Christ, the Russian, the cowboy, and she loved him.

He lay back on his pillow biting his lips mercilessly, exposing the small even white teeth. Kathleen sat motionless beside him, gazing down at her hands which were in her lap. He was watching her closely, but when she looked up he glanced away.

"Sometimes I thought you might care for me a little,

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Kathleen, but since Marshall came I knew I was mistaken." He paused for breath apparently, yet secretly hoping she might respond. The girl was silent.

"You were always kind to me, and I misconstrued your meaning; you pitied me, and again I misinterpreted, thinking it was love. The cowboy hesitated; it hurt him to say the words "Broze told me you did not care for me." He searched the girl's face to mark the effect of what he had just said. It revealed nothing. "Broze said you were only playing with me," he added.

"Broze is wrong," said Kathleen, almost interrupting the boy. "I do not censure him; he thought he was correct in his statement. Tell him he is wrong."

Kathleen paused. "I love you, Christ. My man, my man." Her voice trembled and she laid a cool hand upon the hot brow. The pale tortured face grew bright with smiles.

"I don't feel any pain now, Kathleen; you are with me and I am happy; that is all I know. And you will be my woman, little girl. We will be married in the little blue church, and we will live on the Flat in my home. It will be our home then. I will love you and care for you always. I will be your man and you will be my woman, and we will be happy, won't we, Kathleen?"

Christ was becoming restless; the fever in the brown cheeks was increasing, he moved uneasily.

"But, suppose, Kathleen, I would not get well. Then we could not be married or happy?"

"I will be happy, Christ, to know you love me; that alone will satisfy me." Tears were coming in the girl's eyes, for the face on the bed was more flushed and burn-

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"I will die happy too, Kathleen, since I know you love me." His breath was short and struggling, "Don't leave me, Kathleen." He held her tightly as though fearing she might escape. "Liegt aus Herze, my darling." He smiled unconsciously.

His embrace was relaxing, but Kathleen still clung to him, endeavoring to hold him in life a moment longer. "Christ! Christ!" she sobbed, her head on his breast.

Rallying, he saw her kneeling by the bed, her fair head resting above his heart, felt her warm arms about his brown neck, and heard her sobs. "Don't cry Kathleen; be brave, be brave!"

"My man! My man," sobbed the girl.

"My—woman," faintly.

Kathleen remained with the dead cowboy until the light had gone, and when it was grown dark she refused to leave his side and passed the night holding the cold hand of her dead lover.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

A LETTER FROM HOME.

THE monotony following Kathleen's return to Our Bank, and the resuming of her old duties was wearisome. Everywhere was the memory of the cowboy renewed. There, behind the door, was the nail on which was always hung the gray sombrero; to the left of the east window, on another nail, she still seemed to see his spur; the stiff yellow slicker which he wore on stormy and windy days had been left on a projecting piece of timber behind the stove. The chair he had sat in, the books he had worked on, the pencil and pen he had used were all before her, mocking her in her anguish by their useless idleness.

Sometimes it came to her that he was still with her; she could see him going over the books beside her; again the low, rich voice would ask a question in the old familiar tone, and the girl would glance up almost expecting to see the boy in the black shirt close to her, the gray eyes looking into her face as she had seen them so often—questioning, hoping, fearing. But only the bare bleak walls were surrounding and she was alone. On a narrow board shelf (west of the front window), which Christ had made out of an old box that had come with express, putting it up one evening after closing hours, was a faded bouquet of wild flowers. It had been his last offering to the girl, and she was preserving them lovingly. Often too, he had brought her an apple or an orange and placed them on the shelf. Those had been busy days,

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and days so filled with happiness. "But I did not realize their worth," Kathleen said, as the vacant loneliness of everything settled about her, increasing with its appalling certainty her intense sorrow.

Each evening she watched through the open door as had been her custom, watched down the trail in the direction he took when he rode home. Through the mistiness gathering before her eyes she often fancied she could see the departing figure, bending low over his broncho's neck, as he galloped away. Even the sound of the horse's hoofs were echoed to her at times. But as the weeks wore away, and winter's dread chill settled over everything, there came to her the realizing sense that Christ was no more on this earth; that he was dead.

She worked hard during the long cold winter. When business was slack in Our Bank she busied herself with outside interests. She looked after the sick, took an active part in church affairs, and made herself acquainted with municipal happenings. She desired to advance the town of Freeman, for which a great future had been predicted. That prediction must be materialized.

During the holidays a man came out from the Cities to see about putting in a playhouse; the people required some diversion from their labor, and they eagerly urged on the man in his venture, promising their support. Then too, the county seat was to be moved from Napoleon to Freeman, for Freeman was now the thriving terminus of the N. P., and certain to become a booming little town. Harlan, a hustler from Bismarck, came over to Freeman and established a business school shortly after the new year opened. Later, a bishop who had been a missionary in India, dedicated the little church that, by Kathleen's

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suggestion, had been patterned after the blue church on the Flat.

Kathleen kept herself informed of all these proceedings and when possible took an active part in their execution. To the world looking on, the girl was calm; she had not forgotten her sorrow; she had only buried it within her heart, for she guarded her union with Christ sacredly; it was not an earthly union which death could sever, liberating the survivor; it was a union death had welded; it must therefore be everlasting. She was his woman, he was her man; they were separated for a time, that was all. In this alliance and in her work Kathleen was beginning to find contentment, even happiness.

Every day in February she received a letter from her mother; the estate had been settled to her satisfaction, and she wrote: "And now, dear daughter, I am going on a long journey through the South, and Mexico, and the Islands. I desire to be away for a time from all the old scenes. It is nearly a year since father died, isn't it, daughter? These last months have weighed heavily on me, and each day I am feeling more my severe loss, and it is your loss too, Kathleen. I desire you to accompany me; I intend starting a week from to-morrow. Perhaps it would be more convenient for you to come home, than to make an endeavor to meet me in any of the cities en route. You will start at once, now daughter. Think of our re-union. I believe when we are re-united I shall be quite happy. And, daughter, you do not realize how often I think of you away—away out there in the Dakotas, so far from every one and every comfort. I am sure you must be lonely, very lonely sometimes. What do you do all these long winter evenings, there on

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the prairies, daughter? I do not like to contemplate it. But, dearest, we will soon go to the South together, where there is sunshine and plenty, and life and happiness, as much as I can hope for now, as I am growing old, and father is away. So good-bye, dearest, until I meet you. With an abundance of love,

From Mamma."

It was late when the letter came, but Kathleen sat down at her desk to make her reply. It was midnight before she had finished.

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CHAPTER XL.

LIVED, LABORED AND LOVED.

"FREEMAN, N. D., FEB. 16, 19—.

"MY DEAREST MOTHER:

"It is night, 10 o'clock, and I am alone. I am seated beside a warm glowing fire. It is the coziest spot on the whole earth, mother. What a strange contrast to the world outside! It has been snowing since last Sunday until yesterday, and it now lies even with my window-sill.

"I did not draw down the curtain to-night. I have been looking through the ice-caked panes at the billowy, flaky blanket, enveloping the country. I can see miles and miles. It is all snow, nothing but snow. The wind is not blowing; the night is calm and a big moon is shining dazzlingly on the sparkling crystals about me; the same moon is guarding you too, mother. And oh, I am jealous of the moon to-night, mother. She sees you, perhaps, and you are doubtless gazing at her, but we are separated, you and I—miles and miles divide us. Here I am, writing, half dreaming, of you and the world without.

"Two years ago to-night I was at home with you and father; we were all together. We are in company to-night, too, I feel. We are never alone, our spirits wander to join those we love; though our bodies are shackled and hampered we are united here, father, you and I.

"I am filled with sentiments to-night, mother; they are consoling, too. There is life and eternity, present, future

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—everything is changing. We are here to-day, away to-morrow. One moment we are receiving caresses from loved ones, the next discovers them snatched away from us, and we are quite alone again. But we must be reconciled.

“You miss father ; but mother, dearest mother, I have suffered a loss also. I did not tell you. I did not know myself, but when it came upon me, I realized, I understood. When you see me again mother, you will be surprised in me. I have changed, or better, a change has been made upon me. I am not the Kathleen you saw last. I am still Kathleen, but I am not the same. I have suffered intensely. I have had one lesson in life’s school of trouble, but it has transformed me. I am braver, stronger and better, mother, and I am even happy, after all. I have known—love, a powerful innocent love. Sometimes, mother, I wish I could have had him for a time—I wish, I wish—a little time. But perhaps it is wrong to have hoped for it. Perhaps it is a sin to think of it. I am happy. He is pure and innocent in Heaven, and I am pure and innocent here, and we love each other, my man and his woman, and we are undefiled.

“It is growing late, mother. The many lights that shone out from many homes across the prairies when I started this letter are extinguished, and the people all about me are sleeping, the world and the night are at rest, and I am alone. The light in my window beams out upon the plains in a solitary flame, one ray upon the boundless prairies, as my poor life is but an atom in all this world of countless humans. I only pray to God it may shed one beam of brightness in another’s life, but I am so weak, so feeble, one tiny speck in the multitudes of lives upon the world’s surface, that my frail influence could

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be meagre. But I will try, perhaps some one may heed my faint endeavors, and I will not have lived in vain.

"You speak in your letter of making a trip South, through the States and Mexico, and the Islands; also that you wish me to accompany you. Yesterday we disposed of our grain in our elevators, Monday there will be a shipment made, and it is necessary that I attend to it personally, as it is a matter I would not care to place in another's hands. The people trust me implicitly, and when I look after their affairs they are always satisfied. So, mother, it will not be possible for me to come now, you understand.

"But why not abandon your southern journey? Come here instead. Christ's mother is to live with me; she is all alone now, and you and I can be together, too. Besides, mother, I do not like to go South. I am happy here, buried in mountains of madcap snow, on the plains with my people. I wish to remain where I have lived and labored and loved.

"My light is burning low, mother, so good-night.

Your loving daughter,

KATHLEEN."

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CAPTER XLI.

REFORMATION.

"I HAVE reformed, Kathleen. I love you, I have always loved you, and I will love you for all eternity." Stewart made a movement toward her. He had come upon her unexpectedly one glorious May evening.

"Trust me, believe me, I will still be a success. I will prove myself. Will you Kathleen? Tell me! Answer!"

She did not look at him; her gaze was directed beyond. There was a little plot lying the other side of a fertile meadow spot; the grass was green and a picket fence held out intrusive herds; a simple white stone was entwined by a mountain rose, and violets were nestling near by. The girl's glance fell there, while a moisture gathered in the rare blue eyes. She did not reply to Marshall nor did she look at him, but his glance followed hers, and he understood.





